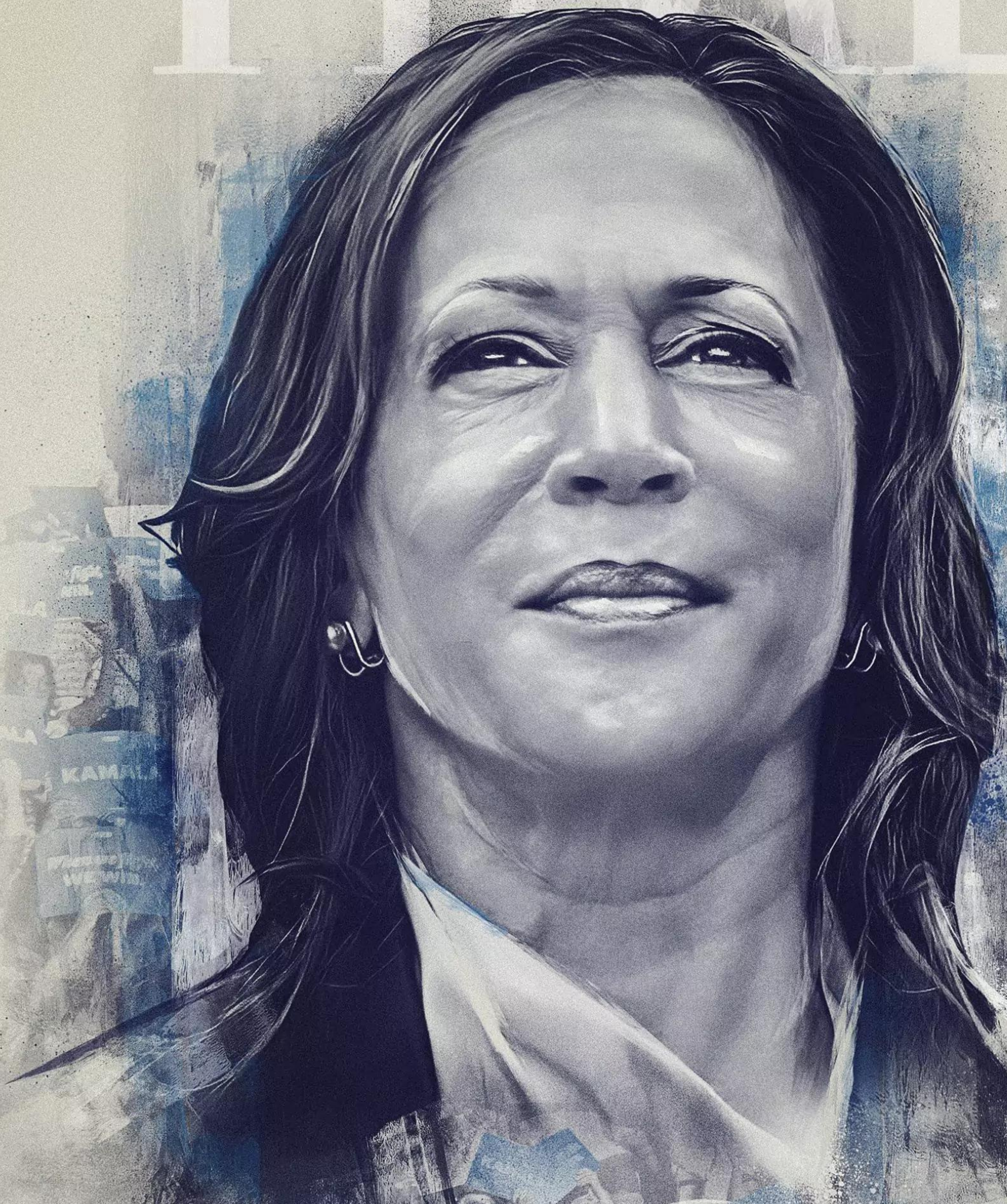


# TIME



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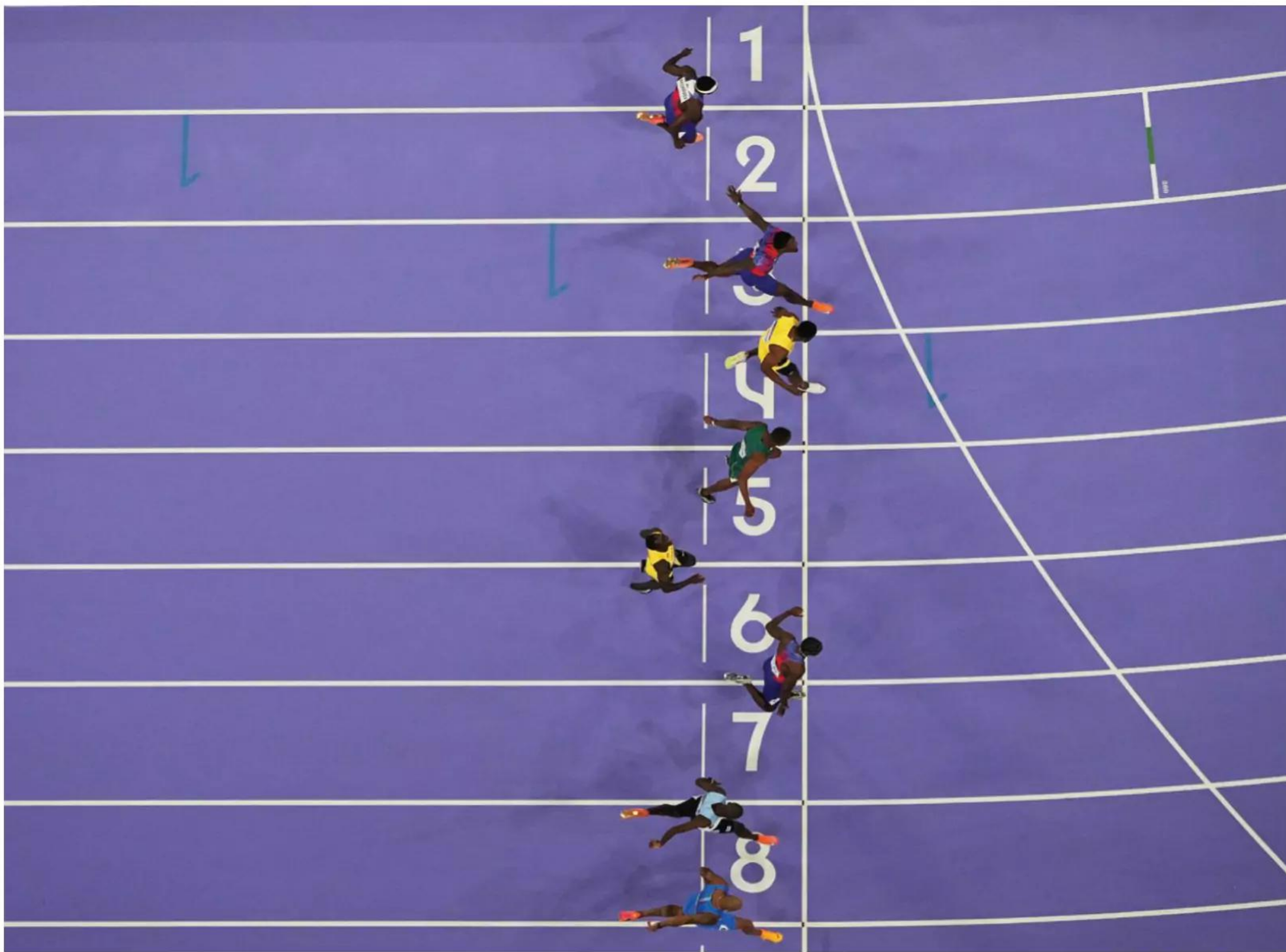
Plus: 5 more of this year's most impressive young people

^

*At a Jhourney retreat in Sonoma County, California, on June 15*

*Photograph by Justin Maxon for TIME*





## Olympics

On TIME.com, read more about two of the most striking pictures to come out of the 2024 Games: above, James Lang's photo of American Noah Lyles (lane 7) winning the 100-m final, and at right, Jerome Brouillet's of Brazilian surfer Gabriel Medina appearing to float while he gives the No. 1 sign. Find more of TIME's Olympics photography in this issue.



## On the covers



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## TIME Talks

On Aug. 8, TIME hosted a dinner on Martha's Vineyard on expanding racial equity. From left: editor-in-chief Sam Jacobs interviewed NFL executive Marissa Solis, W.K. Kellogg Foundation CEO La June Montgomery Tabron, and Arian Simone, Fearless Fund CEO. Read more at [time.com/vineyard-talk](https://time.com/vineyard-talk)

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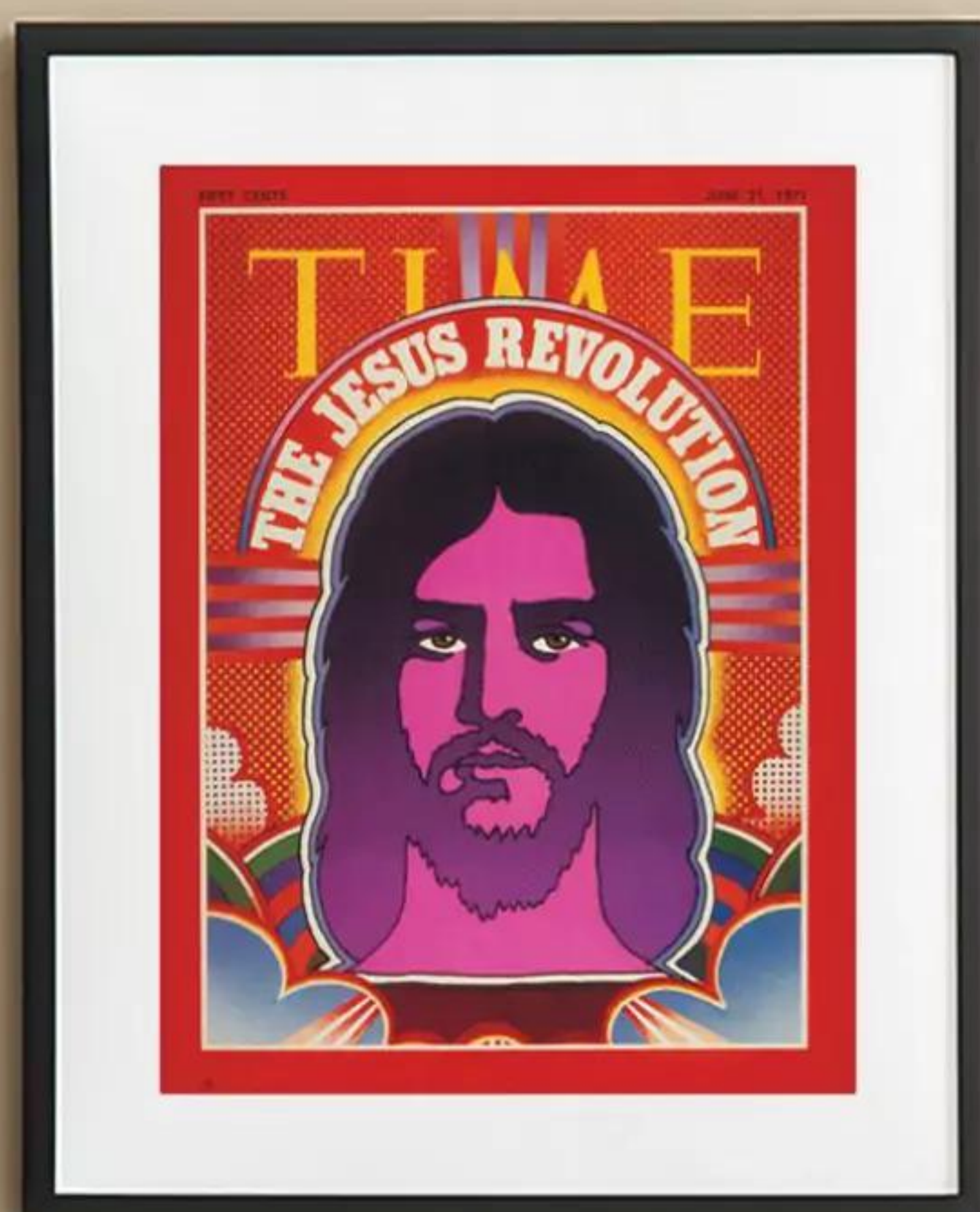


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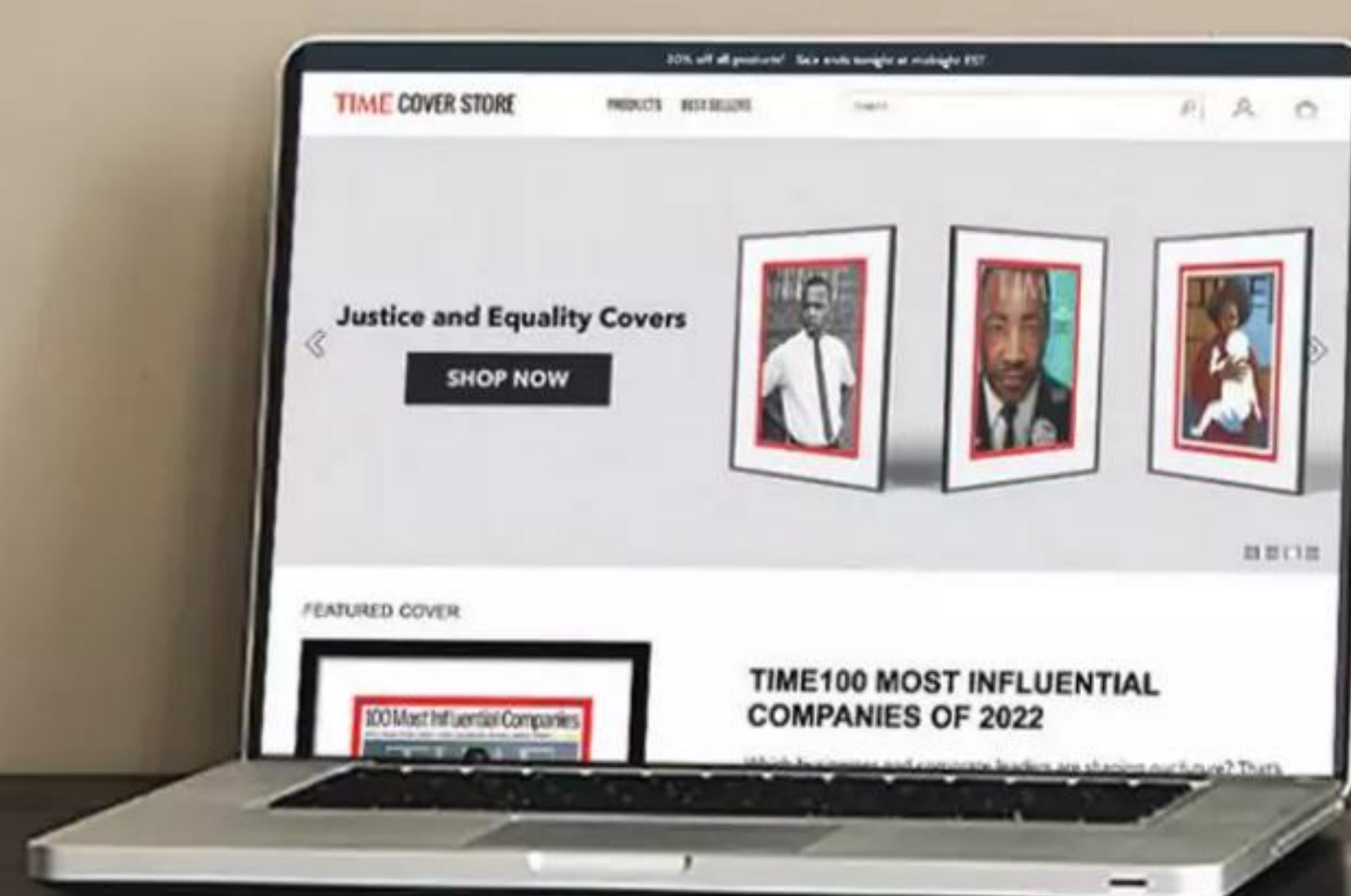


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# The Brief

## UNGREAT BRITAIN

BY ARMANI SYED/LONDON

How online  
misinformation  
stoked antimigrant  
riots across the U.K.



INSIDE

HOW AN AUTHORITARIAN LEADER  
WAS DRIVEN OUT OF BANGLADESH

THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT BEHIND  
THE U.S.-RUSSIA PRISONER SWAP

THE WAYS WE'LL PAY AS  
PERSONAL CHECKS DISAPPEAR

PHOTOGRAPH BY JORDAN PETTITT



**O**NLINE MISINFORMATION ABOUT A TRIPLE murder sparked Britain's worst riots in 13 years, and an international debate about the failure of social media platforms to police hate speech and false reports.

The attacks targeted immigrants, and broke out in predominantly English towns and cities as well as Northern Ireland. Far-right groups were recorded looting, attacking police and locals, and performing Nazi salutes. Mobs chanting "Send them home" and "Islam out" destroyed mosques and graffitied racial slurs on homes. In some of the more violent instances, rioters stormed hotels housing asylum seekers. In one case, a fire was set while guests and staff were inside.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the violence as "far-right thuggery" and later called on large social media companies to police hate that is "whipped up online." Following an emergency Downing Street meeting on Aug. 5, Starmer pledged a "standing army" of 6,000 specialist officers to tackle violent outbreaks.

Hundreds of arrests were made in connection with the attacks, including for stirring racial hatred online. The uprisings were organized on social media following the spread of misinformation that the fatal stabbing of three young girls at a dance class in Southport, a town in north-west England, was carried out by a Muslim immigrant. The violence first erupted on July 30, near the scene of the stabbing, with hundreds of masked people gathering to throw bricks and rocks at a Southport mosque.

After pressure from mainstream media, a judge waived an anonymity rule for minors on Aug. 1 to reveal that the suspect, Axel Rudakubana, 17, was born in Cardiff, Wales, and is not Muslim. The online campaign of false information continued, however. Incendiary posts were shared across Facebook and Telegram, and lists of targets forwarded on WhatsApp. One post claiming that an asylum seeker or migrant was responsible for the Southport stabbing reached at least 15.7 million accounts across various platforms, according to Reuters.

In the days that followed, the online efforts spread violence to other towns and cities across the U.K., including Liverpool, Belfast, Manchester, and smaller urban areas in the north and south of the country.

Social media has become an essential tool for extremist groups to galvanize a "spark to flash," says Jacob Davey, director of policy and research for counter-hate at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Davey says that social media creates a "permissive environment" that enables violent or radical individuals to engage in herd mentality. "We wouldn't see the types of activity we saw over the weekend without it," he told TIME on Aug. 5. Isolated incidents, he says, are platformed by high-profile, "deeply cynical

actors" who encourage their followers to commit acts of violence. Davey says content-recommendation systems and algorithms can amplify disinformation to a boiling point.

The U.K. introduced protections under the Online Safety Act of 2023, which places certain responsibilities on social media companies to ensure user safety on their platforms. But X (formerly Twitter) owner Elon Musk instead framed the crisis to his 193 million followers as a test of free speech. The billionaire engaged in a war of words with Starmer over the protests, the role social media has played in them, and the Prime Minister's crackdown on those involved with the riots—bringing into high relief the global tension between elected governments and the supranational, immensely wealthy, and privately controlled platforms that control communications. On Aug. 3, Musk, a "free-speech absolutist," performed the online equivalent of shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater, writing, "Civil war is inevitable" under

footage of a chaotic street scene someone had labeled "the effect of mass migration and open borders."

**'Civil war is inevitable.'**

—ELON MUSK,  
IN A POST ON X, WHICH  
WAS CONDEMNED BY A  
SPOKESPERSON FOR U.K.  
PRIME MINISTER KEIR STARMER

**THE UNREST HAS BROUGHT** renewed attention to anxieties about U.K. migration. Stopping small boats of migrants crossing the English Channel to enter Britain was a policy priority for both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party during July's election. Donna Jones, a Conservative politician and local police and crime commissioner for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight,

suggested that current unrest is an act of "rebellion" against "mass uncontrolled immigration." Other politicians drew a distinction between concerns about immigration, and the legitimization of what some have branded "thuggery."

But rising fears about migration are concentrated in small communities, says Anand Menon, the director of the U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank. "If you look at the British people as a whole, what you're talking about is a low level of concern about immigration, and actually a far more positive view of immigration overall" than was the case in 2016, when 52% of the nation voted to leave the E.U., says Menon. A February Ipsos poll on Brits' attitudes toward immigration found positive views had dipped since July 2022 but remain overall more positive than negative. In a survey of 3,000 adults, 40% believed migration has had a positive impact on the nation, while 35% held a negative view.

On Aug. 7, when more than 100 far-right gatherings were expected, thousands of peaceful antiracist counter-protesters took to the streets in their local communities. While the anticipated disorder did not emerge, Starmer struck a note of caution the following morning. "It's important that we don't let up," he said. "We need to make sure that in the coming days we can give the necessary reassurance to our communities, many of whom ... are very anxious about the situation."

□





## THE BULLETIN

# Bangladesh on edge after coup

SHEIKH HASINA WAZED WAS PROUD of her house. When the Bangladeshi Prime Minister welcomed TIME to her Ganabhaban official residence in Dhaka last fall, she spent half an hour giving a personal tour of the manicured grounds, stippled with pomelo trees and swing sets for her grandchildren. But on Aug. 5, with furious protesters closing in, Hasina was forced to flee her palatial home in a helicopter. Jubilant crowds clambered onto the Ganabhaban's roof and carried away spoils including furniture, pets, and Hasina's own silk saris. In a televised address, the army chief, General Waker-uz-Zaman, confirmed that Hasina, 76, had resigned and that he would form an interim government. "I am taking full responsibility," he said.

**PEOPLE'S UPRISING** What was effectively a coup d'état had been driven by a popular uprising that metastasized

from initially peaceful demonstrations against employment quotas for descendants of "freedom fighters" in Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. (Against a backdrop of rising joblessness, the quotas were seen as nepotistic rewards for regime loyalists). Instead of talks, Hasina dispatched the Chhatra League, the thuggish student wing of her ruling Awami League party, to confront the demonstrators, with subsequent clashes and a brutal crackdown by security forces officially claiming more than 300 lives, including at least 32 children.

**MILITARY STEPS IN** Despite its historical preference for playing its own hand in politics, Bangladesh's military had backed Hasina, even in the face of her increasingly autocratic tendencies. Yet on April 4, Zaman tellingly declared the armed forces "always stood by the people." Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who pioneered poverty-reducing micro-credit, has been tapped to shepherd the nation of 170 million toward fresh elections. "The country has suffered

Antigovernment protesters storm the Prime Minister's palace in Dhaka on Aug. 5

a lot," Zaman said. "The economy has been hit, many people have been killed—it is time to stop the violence."

**AWAITING RECONCILIATION** Sadly, unrest continued following Hasina's departure, with Awami League buildings ransacked and the nation's Hindu minority also targeted. Hasina, who won a fourth straight term in January elections boycotted by the main opposition party, had ruled the South Asian nation for 20 of the past 28 years. But by co-opting all the organs of the state, Bangladesh's "Iron Lady" entrenched public distrust of the police, military, courts, and civil service. Repairing the integrity of institutions while keeping a lid on radical Islamists will be key to restoring democracy. "Bangladesh is a key player in the global economy," says Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center. "There's going to be concern about the prospect of extended unrest." —CHARLIE CAMPBELL





RELEASED

# Prisoners of Putin

Evan Gershkovich and 15 others, finally free

THOUGH PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN DID THE HONORS WHEN it came time to announce the news, the historic Aug. 1 swap that resulted in the release of more than 20 Russian-held prisoners—including *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich and two other American citizens—relied on the cooperation of seven countries. At a time of deepening global tensions, the rare moment of collaboration was not just a cause for celebration among the prisoners and their families, but also a significant diplomatic achievement.

For Biden, who has long pledged both to secure the release of imprisoned Americans and to support pro-democracy movements abroad, the sweeping exchange was a meaningful victory at a moment when, amid the drama of the presidential election, his capacity to lead had been cast into doubt. Standing alongside the families of the released prisoners, he acknowledged the critical role played

‘Now their brutal ordeal is over, and they’re free.’

—PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

< Gershkovich’s reunion approaches, on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews

by allied nations, framing the win as proof that the U.S. can still lead in the realm of international cooperation.

“For anyone who questions whether allies matter—they do,” Biden said. “Today is a powerful example of why it’s vital to have friends in this world, friends you can trust, work with, and depend upon, especially on matters of great consequence and sensitivity like this. Our alliances make our people safer.”

OF COURSE, for the former prisoners and their families, diplomatic concerns came second. First were the hugs and tears, captured by cameras as Gershkovich, former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Alsu Kurmasheva arrived at Joint Base Andrews just before midnight.

Gershkovich, 32, spent 16 months in a Russian prison after being accused of gathering information for the CIA while on assignment in Yekaterinburg. The claims were dismissed by the U.S. government as baseless, and his trial widely criticized as a sham.

Whelan, 54, was arrested in December 2018 while on a trip to Moscow and convicted on charges of espionage—a verdict international observers called politically motivated. He was sentenced to 16 years in a Russian penal colony after a closed-door trial.

Kurmasheva, 47, was arrested in

## Released by Russia

### EVAN GERSHKOVICH

American *Wall Street Journal* reporter; the most high-profile prisoner

### ALSU KURMASHEVA

Russian American journalist at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

### ILYA YASHIN

Prominent Kremlin critic who has vocally opposed the Russia-Ukraine war

### RICO KRIEGER

German national and former German Red Cross employee

### DIETER VORONIN

Russian German national who worked as a political scientist

### PATRICK SCHÖBEL

German whose drug-smuggling case paralleled Brittney Griner’s

### PAUL WHELAN

Former U.S. Marine and the longest-held American prisoner released

### VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA

Russian British political activist, journalist, and author

### OLEG ORLOV

Co-chair of Memorial, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning human-rights group

### KEVIN LIK

One of the youngest people to ever be convicted of treason in Russia

### GERMAN MOYZHES

Russian German lawyer who helped Russians get German residency

### ALEXSANDRA SKOCHILENKO

Russian antiwar activist, artist, and musician



GERSHKOVICH: AL DRAGO—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; GONZÁLEZ: ALEXANDRE  
 MENEHINI—REUTERS; SWIFT: ANDREAS RENTZ—TAS RIGHTS MANAGEMENT/GETTY IMAGES

2023, during a visit to Russia to care for her ailing mother, on charges of failing to register her American passport. She was later charged with spreading false information about Russia’s military—a charge linked to her work as a journalist and a book she helped edit that criticized the invasion of Ukraine. She was sentenced to 6.5 years in prison after a secret trial.

Asked what he would say to former President Donald Trump, who claimed he would have gotten the American prisoners released without giving anything in return, Biden said, “Why didn’t he do it as President?” In the end, the deal saw the release of Vadim Krasikov, a convicted Russian hit man who’d been serving a life sentence in Germany, as well as three Russians held by the U.S.: convicted hackers Vladislav Klyushin and Roman Seleznyov, and Vadim Konoshchenok, who was facing charges of conspiracy.

The 16 people released from Russia included five Germans and seven Russian citizens who were political prisoners.

“It also says a lot about us that this deal includes the release of Russian political prisoners,” Biden said. “They stood up for democracy and human rights. Their own leaders threw them in prison. The United States helped secure their release as well. That’s who we are. In the United States, we stand for freedom, for liberty, for justice, not only for our own people, but for others as well. That’s why all Americans can take pride in what we’ve achieved today.” —NIK POPLI

**KSENIA FADEYEVA**  
 Head of Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation in Tomsk

**LILIA CHANYSHEVA**  
 Headed a branch of the Anti-Corruption Foundation in Ufa

**VADIM OSTANIN**  
 Head of an Anti-Corruption Foundation branch in Barnaul

**ANDREI PIVOVAROV**  
 Russian opposition activist and human-rights defender



González brandishes electoral records in Caracas

**DISPUTED**  
**Victory for González**  
*Venezuela’s defiant opposition*

BY ALEX GONZÁLEZ ORMEROD

THE DAY AFTER VENEZUELA’S JULY 28 PRESIDENTIAL election, the National Electoral Council said that it could not provide the world with the actual results of the vote—yet somehow it “irrevocably” declared the autocratic Nicolás Maduro as the winner, over opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia. The opposition was ready. It had gathered 73.2% of the receipts printed by Venezuela’s electronic voting machines, and published them on a website launched a day after the vote. By its calculations, González won with a two-thirds majority.

Venezuela’s democracy has long been in crisis. What began as a popular movement under socialist President Hugo Chávez in 1999 gradually slid into autocracy. His expropriation schemes and a 2014 oil-price slump all but destroyed the petro state’s economy—and Maduro, who took office in 2013, shifted from redistribution to repression. The opposition was under no illusion that this election would be free or fair. It ran a campaign that expressed trust that the ballot box would vindicate it, while planning for the worst.

Maduro’s government has doubled down on the baseless claim that Venezuelan democracy is under siege by foreign interventionists and has cracked down on protests, but the opposition’s plan is producing results: The U.S. has come out in support of González, and the E.U. doesn’t recognize Maduro’s win. Even friendly Latin American governments are pressuring him to set the record straight. Venezuela has powerful allies, but Maduro is increasingly alone. The upshot in Venezuela remains uncertain, but the crucial days that followed the election were a long time in the making.

González Ormerod is founder of The Mexico Political Economist

**NAMED**  
 Oct. 7 terrorist-attack architect **Yahya Sinwar, as the political leader of Hamas**, the Palestinian militant group announced Aug. 6, six days after the assassination of its previous leader in Iran.

**RULED**  
 That **Google, with its search engine, is a monopoly that has acted illegally** to maintain that status, U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta ruled Aug. 5, concluding a mammoth antitrust case brought by the Justice Department; Google has said it will appeal.

**DISMANTLED**  
 Many of the **thousands of sidewalk dining sheds** in New York City that proliferated during COVID-19 lockdown, ahead of an Aug. 3 deadline to either meet specific regulations or tear the structures down.

**DEVELOPED**  
 A **“cool paint” for cars**, Nissan announced Aug. 6; it claims the thick paint lowers vehicle interior temperatures by 9°F in tests.

**CANCELED**  
 Three **Taylor Swift concerts in Vienna** after a foiled terrorism threat, announced Aug. 7, for which two people were arrested.





## GOOD QUESTION

# As the personal check disappears, what comes next?

BY ALANA SEMUELS

ONE OF THE FIRST CHECKS EVER RECORDED WAS WRITTEN in the 11th century in a marketplace in Basra, in what is today Iraq. There, a merchant issued a *sakk*: written instructions to his bank to make a payment from his account.

A thousand years later, this form of payment is finally disappearing. Target in July became the latest retailer to stop accepting checks. It's just the latest sign that the check is nearing obsolescence: the average American writes just one check a month, down from three in 2016, according to a Federal Reserve survey. In 1995, the year of peak usage, Americans wrote 49.5 billion checks, which was 15 checks each month by every man, woman, and child in the U.S.

"I absolutely think that we are moving to a world of 'check zero,'" says Scott Anchin, vice president at the Independent Community Bankers of America.

From a security perspective, this is a positive. Checks are not a particularly safe way to send money. They have your account and routing numbers on them, sensitive information that criminals could use. They can be stolen in the mail and changed to be made out to different people or for different amounts.

Flawed as checks are, though, they haven't gone away entirely because many people still depend on them, especially to pay rent and utility bills. But experts say a new kind of payment may finally change that.

The newest type of payment—the first to be introduced in the U.S. since the 1970s—is called instant payments, in which money moves from your account to another immediately. You may think you already use instant payments with services like Venmo, but you don't. Those payments come from a Venmo account rather than directly from your bank account, and the funds can take some time to move.

Here's how instant payments work: Different types of payments—wire transfers, checks, ACH—all happen over what are called rails. A rail is essentially the system that gets your money from one place to another. Think of a pile of cash in a briefcase. You could move that briefcase from one place to another in a car, or a bus, or a train, or an airplane; those transportation methods are like the rails that move your money. Instant payments are a new kind of payment rail, but there still needs to be a user interface to allow consumers to access them. Some payments on Zelle already happen on an instant-payment rail, says Bridget Hall of ACI Worldwide, which builds software for financial institutions and large enterprises.

One year ago, the Federal Reserve launched FedNow,

an instant-payment rail that allows for people to send money to one another if they're enrolled in participating institutions. Another payment rail, RTP, short for Real Time Payments, was launched in 2017 by The Clearing House, a private payment-system infrastructure.

Instant payments are different from anything that exists now, including wire transfers, ACH payments (essentially electronic bank transfers), and debit cards because they happen in real time, at any hour of any day, and don't cost anything. Yet they accounted for just 1.5% of total payments in 2023, about 3.5 billion transactions, according to ACI Worldwide. Experts expect that number to grow

to 14 billion real-time transactions by 2028.

Instant payments are already very popular in other parts of the world. In India, real-time payments were launched in 2010 and now make up 84% of the share of all electronic payments. But the two rails for instant payments in the U.S.—FedNow and RTP—are relatively new. It's taken this long for the U.S. to adopt real-time payments because there were intermediaries like PayPal that allowed people to feel like they were paying someone else instantly, says Hall.

There are some big advantages to instant payments. Say you have to fund a lunch account at your kids' school: a credit card may involve a transaction fee, while a check takes days to be processed. The velocity of instant payments is a good thing for businesses too; instead of waiting for a check to arrive, and then discovering there's no money in the user's account, an electricity company can get paid instantly.

"If we start looking at the payment methods used to complete a transaction today," Hall says, "we have many use cases where the options either aren't great or aren't good enough." □

▼  
*Balancing  
your checkbook  
could be a  
thing of the past*



**'We are  
moving  
to a world  
of "check  
zero."'**

—SCOTT ANCHIN,  
INDEPENDENT  
COMMUNITY  
BANKERS OF AMERICA



# How often should you wash your bedding?

BY ANGELA HAUPT

EVERY MORNING WHEN LIBBEY Castle wakes up, she strips her bed and chucks her sheets into the washing machine. It doesn't matter if it's a weekday or the weekend, if she has a light or a busy day ahead, if she slept well or tossed and turned all night. The sheets will be washed.

"I let them do their thing, and I go make coffee feeling happy," says Castle, 30, who lives in Washington, D.C. "Then I throw them into the dryer before I go work out. I come back, I grab a shower, and the sheets are done. I throw them on the bed, and then I start my day." Knowing fresh sheets await her boosts her spirits straight through to bedtime.

Health experts agree that Castle is onto something: most of us could benefit from washing our bedding more often. Sheets, pillowcases, and comforters can harbor dirt, germs, and allergens that affect our skin and overall health, says Dr. Hannah Kopelman, a dermatologist in New York. "It's a buildup of all these contaminants, and eventually that could lead to skin irritation and acne breakouts," she says. "You might notice your skin feels like it has clogged pores or folliculitis," which happens when hair follicles become inflamed. Or maybe your allergies, asthma, or eczema are flaring up because the dead skin cells we shed while asleep are attracting legions of dust mites. All are good reasons to make more trips to the washing machine.

But what's the sweet spot for washing frequency? We asked experts to share their preferred intervals—plus tips on how to do it well.

## Pillowcases

You rest your head on the dirtiest spot of the bed. "Pillowcases are the landing pad for your skin, hair, and all the oils and dirt carried with them," says Jason James, who runs Dustpan & Brush, a home-cleaning service in Australia. He recommends **washing them at least once a week**. People who have sensitive skin or allergies often benefit from a more frequent routine, like every three to four days. To help clean cases last longer, shower before bed. And don't forget your pillows; washing them once per season is the sweet spot, James says.

## Comforter

If you use a blanket as your top sheet, it needs to be washed at least once a week. But if your blankets and comforter are not directly touching your skin, plan on washing them every two to three months, says Kathleen Razmus, director of operations, training, and development with ZIPS Cleaners, a dry-cleaning franchise. "**Dust and dirt will accumulate**, so it's good to freshen it up," she says. "If the comforter is touching your skin, that's different, and you might want to make it more frequent."

## Mattress

Every time you strip the bed, **let the mattress breathe** for a bit rather than immediately putting on a new set of sheets. "Leave it for a few hours with some windows open," James advises. Stagnant air and covered mattresses encourage dust mites, allergens, and mold spores to thrive. And vacuum it two to three times a year, says Tonya Harris, an environmental-toxins expert who wrote *The Slightly Greener Method*. If it smells, sprinkle on a thin layer of baking soda, let it sit for a few hours, and then Hoover it up.

## Sheets

At a minimum, you should wash your sheets once a week. But a variety of factors call for more frequent washing. One is the summer heat, since **sweat "can lead to bacteria and odor on our sheets,"** says Harris. Plus, allergens like pollen can travel inside with you, so washing more frequently can help reduce symptoms. It's also a good idea to wash your sheets more often when you're sick or if you sleep with pets, Harris says. In those cases, every three to four days should suffice.

## Mattress pad

People tend to overlook their mattress pads, but it's a good idea to wash them every two to three months, Razmus says. Given that it helps protect your mattress from sweat, spills, bladder leaks, dust mites, and dead skin, it can get pretty dirty. **Check the care label** closely; different materials call for different washing techniques.





# Stills of motion

As the Olympic Games swept across Paris, photographer Robbie Lawrence traversed the city for TIME to capture the beauty and movement of athletics within the confines of single frames. Photographers were often distant from the action, so Lawrence prized the moments of “surreal” nearness. “I have found myself drawn to that proximity—the closeness to the tension between joy and despair,” he says.

Photographs by  
Robbie Lawrence for TIME

► For more of our best photography, visit [time.com/lightbox](https://time.com/lightbox)

▼  
**MEN’S 100 M**  
Sprinter Noah Lyles after his heat of the men’s 100 m on Aug. 3, the day before he won the gold medal in the final



►  
**WOMEN’S WATER POLO**  
A player cuts through the water during the Group A match between teams for Canada and China on July 31

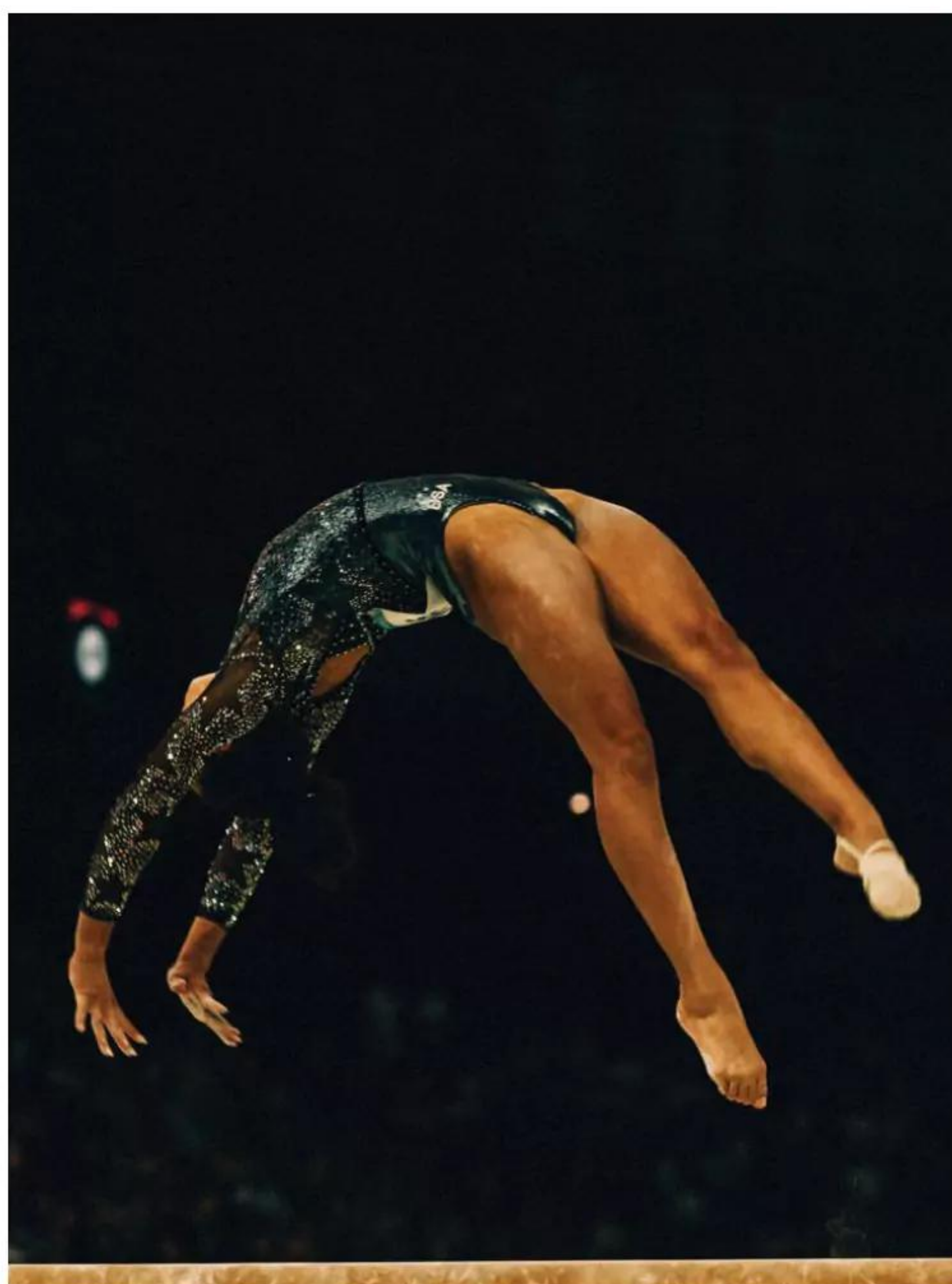






#### **MEN'S TRIATHLON**

Competitors appear as a tangle of arms and swim caps in the Seine during the swimming portion of the July 31 race



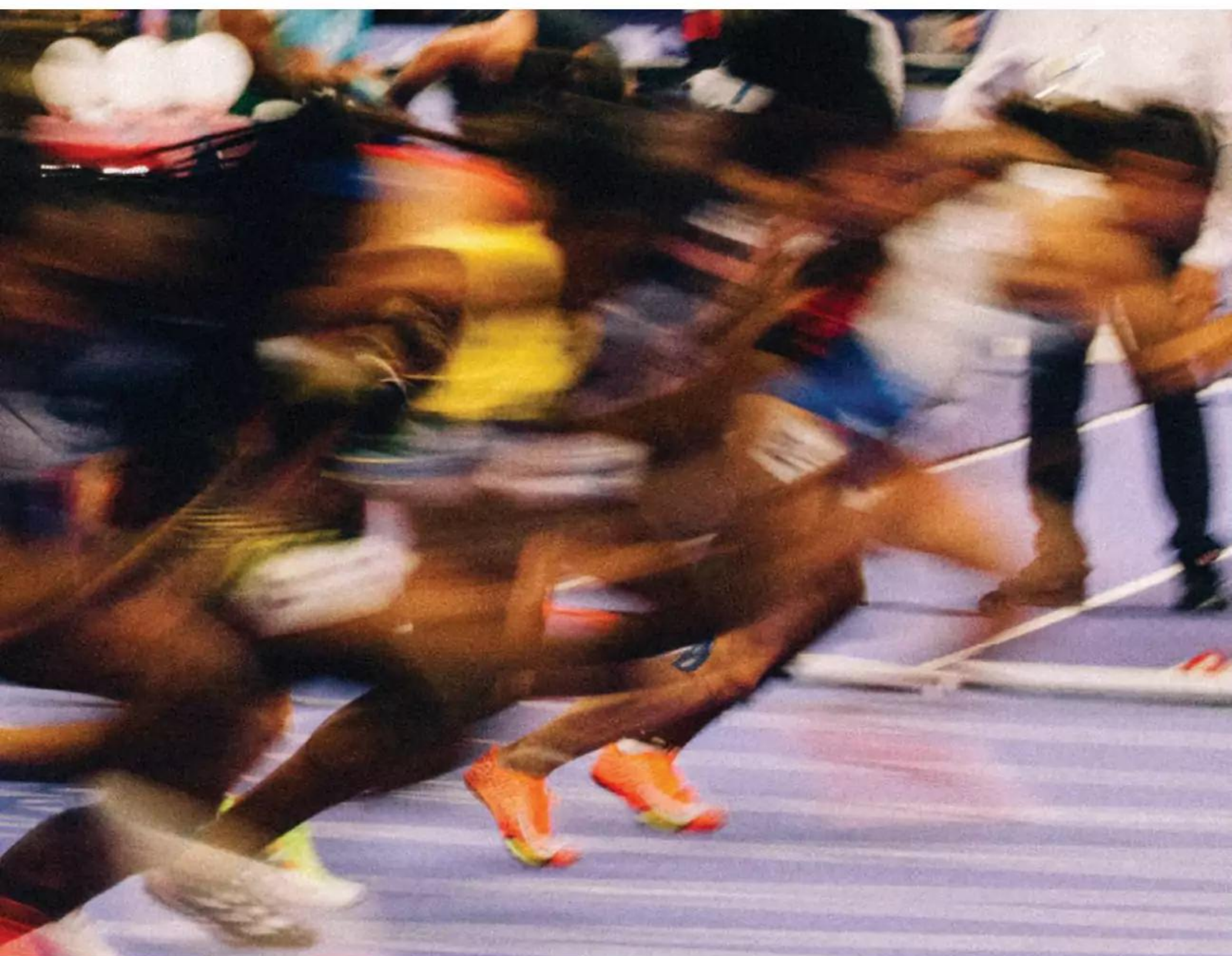
#### **BALANCE BEAM**

Team USA's youngest gymnast, Hezly Rivera, 16, in a back handspring stepout during qualifications on July 28



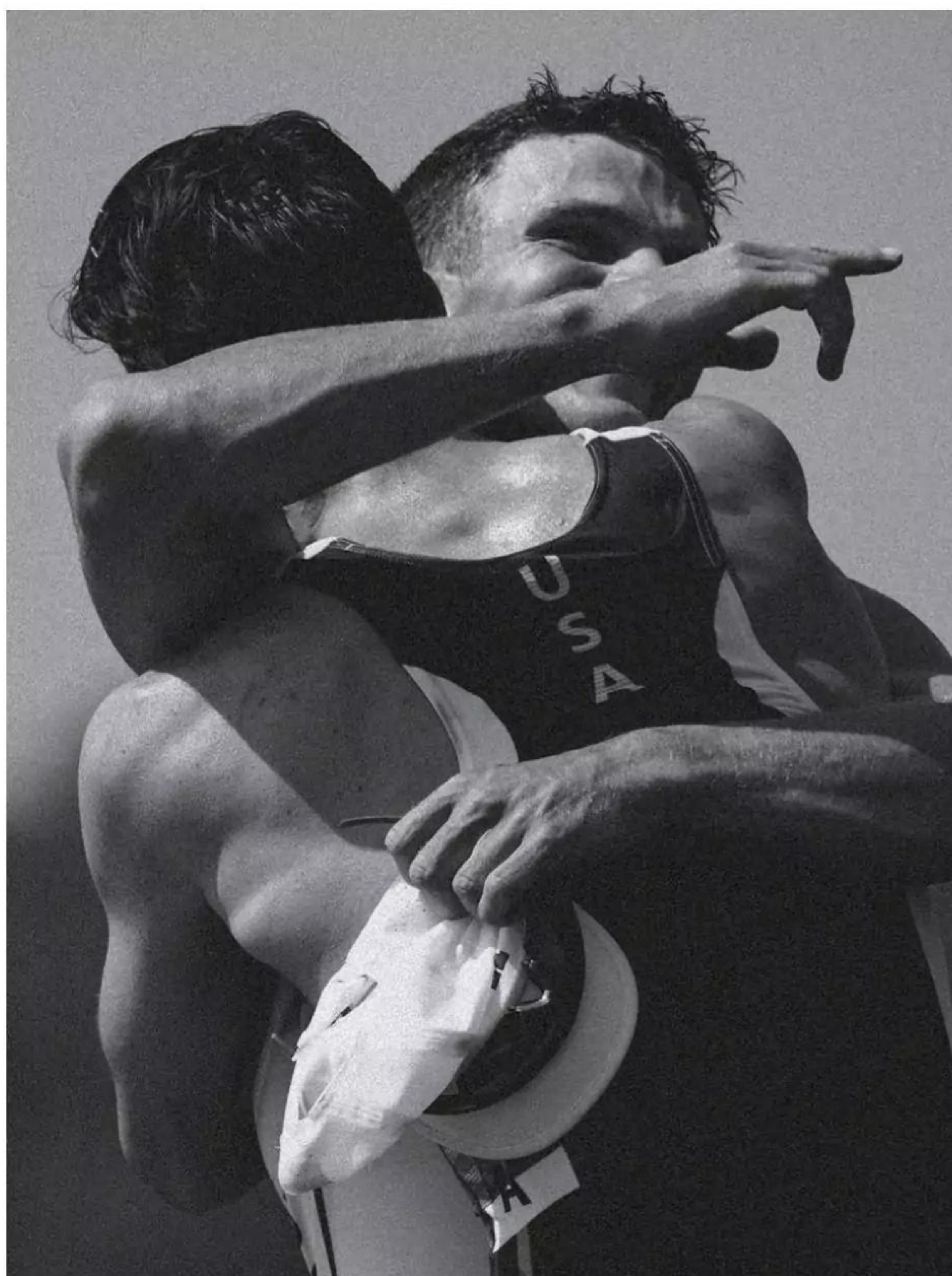
#### **MEN'S ROWING**

Two rowers on the U.S. four class team embrace after finishing first and clinching the gold medal at the Aug. 1 regatta



#### **WOMEN'S 100 M**

Everything but the feet is a blur in the semifinal round of the women's 100-m race on Aug. 3







# TOMORROW'S GREATEST PLACE TO LIVE

New Murabba's innovative downtown planning is set to create an ideal, dynamic neighborhood for residents

Saudi Arabia has its sights fixed on the future. That ethos is evident in its marquis urban planning project, New Murabba, a 19-square-kilometer area destined to be the “world’s largest modern downtown” within the borders of Riyadh, the Kingdom’s capital.

Work at New Murabba is progressing at warp speed, and when the ambitious modern metropolis comes to fruition in 2030, it will have several cultural and entertainment venues, a new iconic landmark called The Mukaab, walking trails, parks, and much more. Located in northwest Riyadh at the intersection of King Khalid and King Salman roads, New Murabba will host more than 120,000 residential units, in the long-term, to accommodate hundreds of thousands of residents. It is being designed to enhance the standard of living, setting an example for the rest of the Kingdom, and beyond.

As the district is being built from the ground up, every element is thoughtfully designed. Some of the key benefits that residents can expect include:

## Health and Sustainability

The development will prioritize green spaces, parks, walking trails, and cycling paths, reducing reliance on vehicle transportation and creating an environmentally friendly urban landscape. In addition, New Murabba’s Chief Development Officer, Carl Schibrowski, emphasizes the project’s commitment to sustainability, including a clear decarbonization strategy and climate-positive design, with the goal of ultimately making New Murabba a carbon-neutral destination. “The sustainability features that New Murabba will implement will have a positive impact in shaping the future of urban planning and development in the Kingdom,” says Schibrowski.

## Interconnected Walkability

While the urban planning term “15-minute city” is relatively new in the public consciousness, the new downtown is being constructed to exemplify its benefits. “The 15-minute feature means that no matter where you are in New Murabba, you are only 15 minutes walking distance away from your destination,” says New Murabba Executive Director Eissa Almunif. That means people will always be a

short walk away from amenities and services such as healthcare, groceries, shopping, schools, dining, entertainment, and more.

Furthermore, the entire development is located at just a 20-minute drive away from Riyadh’s airport, and will be connected to the metro network in Riyadh, providing access to key destinations and enhancing overall connectivity.

## Community and Culture

Supporting Saudi Vision 2030, New Murabba aims to strengthen the Kingdom’s values and national identity. The project will emphasize intergenerational living and tight-knit communities with residential offerings ranging from luxury modern apartments to homes inspired by traditional Najdi architecture. The district will also host national and international schools, and a university, making it ideal for young families.

New Murabba represents the future of urban living and planning in Riyadh. Combining sustainability, advanced infrastructure, and cultural integration, this modern metropolis will provide a transformative experience for residents from all walks of life.

Learn more about New Murabba at [time.com/newmurabba/tgp/live](https://time.com/newmurabba/tgp/live)



# The View

HISTORY

## **WATERGATE'S REAL LEGACY**

BY BRUCE J. SCHULMAN

When Richard Nixon resigned, 50 years ago this August, he became the first and (so far) only U.S. President driven from the nation's highest office. His departure was the result of the political establishment coming together in the wake of Watergate. The experience, Nixon's successor asserted, had vindicated American democracy. "Our Constitution works," President Gerald Ford declared. ▶

INSIDE

THE IMMORTAL QUESTION OF OUR  
DIGITAL REMAINS

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE  
THE RISK OF DEMENTIA

WHAT SAM BANKMAN-FRIED WANTED  
FROM WASHINGTON



In the early 1970s, it seemed as if the nation's leadership, Republicans and Democrats alike, had closed ranks to preserve widely held norms. Half a century later, the lessons of Watergate look very different. Instead of constraining the Executive Branch, Nixon's ouster marked the beginning of a long-term effort to strengthen the presidency, which culminated with the July 1 presidential-immunity ruling from the Supreme Court. Today's Americans live not in the reassuring afterglow of Watergate, but in its long, destabilizing shadow.

After Nixon's resignation, Congress reformed the campaign-finance system and passed an Ethics in Government Act that included a mechanism for independent-counsel investigations of Executive Branch scandals. And after the Supreme Court ruled in *U.S. v. Nixon* that the President must comply with subpoenas, the Presidential Records Act of 1978 made clear that the papers of the President and Vice President belonged to the public.

Watergate produced a broad consensus to rein in "the imperial presidency." Congress established intelligence-oversight committees with access to classified materials. It also produced unprecedented respect for the press, which had played a key role in exposing the scandal. In 1974, trust in the media hit a high at 72%.

A new generation of reformers were inspired to run for office. In the 1974 midterms, Democrats won congressional majorities. These "Watergate Babies" undid the seniority system in Congress and brought into the open previously backroom decisionmaking. They even brought TV cameras into the House of Representatives. In the first post-Watergate presidential contest, Democrat Jimmy Carter found success by campaigning on a fairly credible claim that he would not lie to the American people. "What the voters are looking for," he said, "is someone who can run the government competently, who understands their problems, and will tell the truth."

And yet, today, the political landscape could hardly be more different. What happened?



*President Richard Nixon waves goodbye to the White House from the steps of Marine One on Aug. 8, 1974*

Wiping out mainstream Republicans like Nixon and Ford, Watergate cleared the way for the takeover of the GOP by Sun Belt conservatives, while stoking the distrust in government that fueled the Reagan Revolution. On the other side of the aisle, the Watergate Babies—younger, more suburban—launched the transition of the Democratic Party from the voice of blue collar workers into today's more affluent, educated bloc.

**ETHICS RULES BECAME** tools for forcing out rivals. For example, in 1988, ambitious young Republican Congressman Newt Gingrich filed ethics charges against Democratic House Speaker Jim Wright, ousting him the next year. Before Watergate, federal indictments of public officials were almost unheard of; in the following two decades there were over a thousand. Meanwhile, the press became more adversarial and partisan. By 2016, only 32% of Americans reported at least a fair amount of trust in the media.

Congress became more transparent but less effective. In the House, the Watergate Babies forced out long-serving committee chairs, diluting leadership's control over the agenda.

The Senate lowered the bar for ending filibusters and empowered junior members. Cable TV gave members of Congress easy access to media. On both sides of the Hill, leadership lost power to discipline members and force through legislation. Today, rank-and-file legislators like Marjorie Taylor Greene can become celebrities and pressure their parties on fringe issues, while Congress has become almost completely unproductive. With members of Congress functioning more like independent agents, the institution no longer focused credibly on checking executive power. And so, with aid from conservative majorities on the Supreme Court, Presidents reasserted claims of privilege and won immunity from prosecution. Once ridiculed, Nixon's claims of "inherent" presidential power became law.

Today's polarized parties, hollowed-out Congress, ineffective ethics codes, and threat of a truly imperial presidency may look little like the 1970s. But they are long-term outgrowths of the Watergate era—and evidence that perhaps Ford's claim about the Constitution was mistaken all along.

*Schulman is a professor at Boston University and author of The Seventies*



## TECHNOLOGY

# Everyone on the web will die. What about their data?

BY CARL OHMAN

THE INTERNET IS AGING. AS SOON AS THE 2060S, THERE may be more dead than alive users on Facebook. Many of the platforms that are now part of society's basic infrastructure face a similar prospect. What happens when they—and their users—die will be a critical battleground for the internet's future. We have done virtually zero preparation for it.

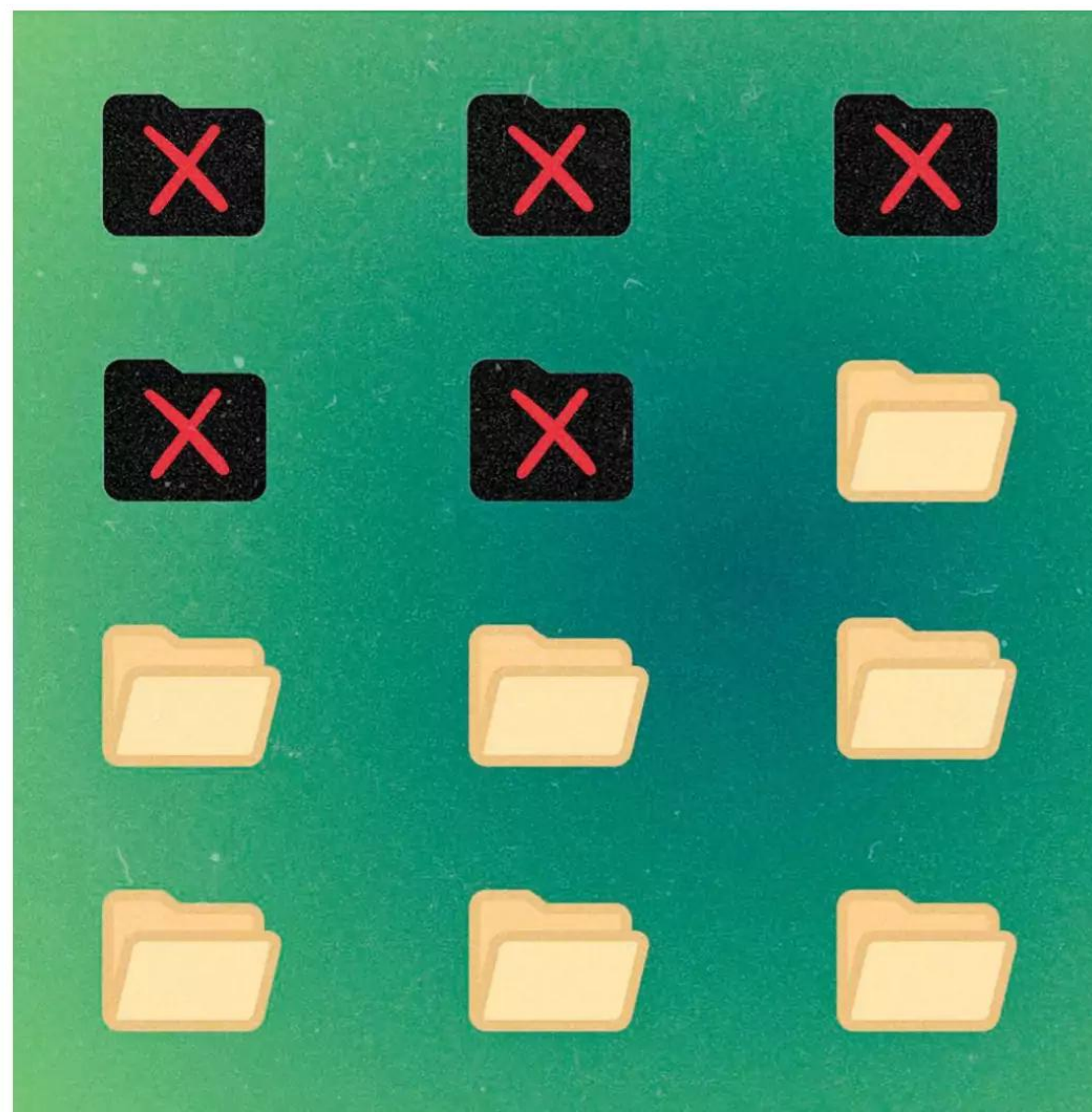
Back in 1997, when John Perry Barlow published his now legendary “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” he boldly stated that the governments of the world—the “giants of flesh and steel,” as he called them—had no dominion over cyberspace. The internet was a “new home of Mind” beyond the flesh, where its young and tech-savvy citizens would never age or decay. We still tend to see the internet that way. We also tend to think of it as something that has largely to do with youth. In short, we see cyberspace as a space without time.

All of that is far from the truth. We know that everyone using the internet will die, and that hundreds of millions, if not billions, will do so in the next three decades. We know this poses a serious threat to an economy based on targeted ads (the dead don't click on them). We also know that whoever seizes control over dead-user data will wield enormous power over our future access to the past. Just consider that one person—Elon Musk, no less—now owns the entirety of the tweets that constitute(d) the Arab Spring, #MeToo, and Black Lives Matter. When future historians seek to understand their past, it is the Musks and Mark Zuckerbergs of the world who will set the terms.

Experience (and sheer logic) tells us that the dominant tech platforms today will sooner or later fail and die. What will happen to the user data? Can it be auctioned to the highest bidder? Will it be used to train new algorithms to trace the users, or their descendants? A hypothetical failure of a DNA-testing firm that stores our most personal information is a chilling example. These questions show how the fate of digital remains is inextricably entangled with the privacy of the living.

**WITH STAKES SO HIGH**, it is important that we make some kind of plan. There is no technological fix. For it is a fundamentally political and even philosophical task. The questions we must ask ourselves include how we want to live with the past and its inhabitants (the dead), which principles should guide our stewardship of the digital past, how long (if at all) should our digital remains be accessible, and for what purpose?

Today, these questions are almost completely outsourced to the market. The answer to each of them is whatever Big Tech thinks is going to be lucrative. That is profoundly irresponsible. We must begin to think about the internet, and our stewardship over it, as a long-term



**The  
archives  
have always  
belonged  
to the dead**

intergenerational project. Just as globalization forced us all to become *cosmopolitans* (citizens of the universe) by breaking spatial boundaries, the aging of the internet compels us to become *archeopolitans*—citizens of an archive—by breaking temporal boundaries.

Ever since Barlow's declaration, we have thought of cyberspace as something fundamentally new and independent of the past. But by thinking of ourselves, the first digital generation, as *archeopolitans*, it becomes clear that it is we, the living, who are the newcomers. For the archives have always belonged to the dead. What is new about the online world is just that the living have moved in with them.

Being a good *archeopolitan* is to recognize this, and to take the intergenerational stewardship of the web seriously. The first step is to make sure there is some basic framework to govern how the internet, including its platforms and users, can age and die with dignity and without threatening the privacy of their descendants. I call upon the governments of the world, these giants of flesh and steel, to begin this task—before it's too late.

*Ohman, author of The Afterlife of Data, teaches at Uppsala University in Sweden*





◀ Walz greets Harris at the airport in St. Paul, Minn., in March



## The D.C. Brief

By Philip Elliott  
WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

IF THE UPPER MIDWEST IS THE fail-safe for Democrats' Blue Wall, then they reached to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz in search of a new break-in-case-of-emergency tool.

Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris selected Walz, a popular former Congressman and ex-high school teacher, as her running mate and introduced him to the nation at an Aug. 6 rally in Philadelphia. In picking Walz, Harris follows the tried-and-true winning rules for a running mate: first do no harm, and, second, never make voters wish the names were reversed.

Walz, 60, emerged as a late-rising contender for the gig in a field full of higher-wattage contenders like Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, Arizona Senator Mark Kelly, and Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear. But Walz's plainspoken demeanor, his six terms in the U.S. House, and two successful runs for governor helped Harris cast him in the role she currently fills as the understudy for the presidency. Advisers say his chemistry with Harris helped to cement the decision, and outside allies—even those who previously harbored doubts about his onetime support from

the NRA and his moderate tendencies, like being a rare Democrat who voted to hold Barack Obama's Attorney General in contempt of Congress—were expected to quickly fall in line, part of a Democratic retrofitting that followed President Joe Biden's surprise decision on July 21 that he would forgo renomination himself.

To be sure, Walz is hardly a dynamo who will guarantee Democrats' fortunes. He may take Minnesota off Republicans' dream map—no Republican has won the state's electoral votes since 1972—but he doesn't fix Democrats' weaknesses in other parts of his region, let alone necessarily boost their ambitions for Pennsylvania, Georgia, or North Carolina. **Walz doesn't hurt anywhere, but he certainly doesn't heal anywhere, either.**

While Harris' polling has markedly improved upon Biden's—especially

**'Listen, I want you to do this with me. Let's do this together.'**

—VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS

with younger voters, women, and communities of color—she is far from a surefire win in the contest against former President Donald Trump. Harris and Trump are still within a sneeze of each other in battleground states, and Trump has a slight and persistent advantage in them.

For his part, Walz has already proved himself a capable wingman with an easy-to-understand cadence. Armchair pundits credited Walz's rise to his use of the jab “weird” to describe Republicans' general vibe these days, a ding that clicked throughout a party struggling to find a concise description of Trumpism. Others may now be using the same playbook, but it was Walz's delivery—fairly or not—that resonated with a level of authenticity that's unmatched when others lean on a similar corny script.

**WHILE WALZ'S MIDWESTERN** knack distilled a much needed message for his party, that ultimately mattered less than this one truth that Harris knows all too well: the person in the Oval Office and the person in the room down the hall need to be in sync. A bad blend can result in the misfortune that was Harris' first stretch in the West Wing as an often isolated member of Biden's outer orbit. Late to rise into her own lane, Harris has perhaps learned the most important lesson available to any VP: the role can be lonely if defined solely by its relationship to the one gig that outranks it.

In Walz, Harris found a reliable avatar who placated most of the Democratic Party's blocs. While he often disagreed with progressives in his state, he also leaned into their instincts once he found himself governor with Democrats in charge of the state house and senate. For instance, he not only signed into law a measure to protect abortion rights and provide free school meals for students, he also made legal recreational marijuana a reality. While he was an A-rated member of the House from the NRA, that quickly



became a failing grade as governor as he off-loaded the gun lobbyists' donations after the 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas and backed a 2018 ban on assault weapons after the school shooting in Parkland, Fla. When given a free hand, he revealed himself as an ally liberals could find reliable, dating back to his days doubling as a state-champion high school football coach and the first adviser to Mankato West's gay-straight alliance.

Even so, Walz's handling of the protests after George Floyd's death by dispatching the National Guard will draw closer scrutiny and perhaps betray his new reputation as a pal to the post-2020 Democratic identity. Republicans, meanwhile, wasted no time in resurfacing his decades-old drunk-driving arrest.

On his own, Walz is far from the total salve Democrats need. While Biden's exit calmed insiders' jitters and Walz can shore up support in his backyard, fellow Blue Wall bricks like Wisconsin and Michigan in his region remain iffy. Pennsylvania too is a jump ball, which is why Harris and Walz debuted as the ticket there, before jetting off to other battlegrounds to start the march toward the convention in Chicago less than two weeks later and Election Day in fewer than 100 days. Their initial blitz signaled where Democrats see the true places in play: Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada.

In Walz, Harris signaled with her first major act of potential governing how she would approach a White House under her management. It matched her own experiences four years ago when Biden elevated her out of the Senate into the thankless job he held for eight years during the Obama era: help the top of the ticket, never overshadow the boss, and do a steady best not to alienate any of the must-have constituencies in the Democratic Party. As a bonus, this presidential nominee might even like her potential replacement.



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TIME's politics newsletter at  
[time.com/theDCbrief](https://time.com/theDCbrief)



## Health Matters

### By Jamie Ducharme

HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

DEMENTIA IS ONE OF THE scariest diagnoses in medicine, in part because it seems impossible to prevent. But recent research suggests that's not the case. In fact, a new report based on an analysis of hundreds of studies says **almost half of dementia cases could be prevented or delayed** if people adopted certain habits. These are among the most effective.

**Socialize.** New and varied experiences work the brain in different ways, says Gill Livingston, a professor in the department of brain sciences at University College London and lead author of the new report. "Your brain has lots of different functions, so the idea is to keep them all engaged." One of the best ways to do that, she says, is by talking to lots of different people. You'll keep your brain sharp by coming up with conversation topics, and get healthy social contact.

**Stay physically active.** Regular exercise may slash the risk of developing dementia by almost 30%. "You don't have to be an ultramarathon runner"—just spend a little time each day moving in whatever way is enjoyable for you, Livingston says. If that means biking or playing a contact sport, wear a helmet. Suffering even one head injury over your lifetime may put you in danger of cognitive decline, research suggests.

**Take care of your mental health.** Depression is a well-established risk factor for dementia—but addressing it goes a long way. A 2022 study found that people who

were treated for depression had a significantly lower dementia risk than people with untreated depression.

**Follow doctor's orders.** Many of the health metrics that come up during a routine physical—levels of "bad" cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes risk, and weight—also have ties to dementia risk, studies suggest. Exercising, eating a diet rich in nutritious foods, and taking prescribed medications may help preserve your cognitive health too.

**Don't smoke at all or drink too much.** Current smokers may be up to 40% more likely to develop Alzheimer's than people who have never used cigarettes, per a 2015 research review—but that increased risk seems to mostly disappear among former smokers. Quitting, in other words, helps. Cutting back on booze is a good idea too. Increasingly, science suggests that the less you drink, the better for your brain.

**Protect your senses.** Hearing and vision loss are both associated with dementia. While you can take some preventative steps—like keeping the volume low when listening to music—both conditions can be unavoidable parts of aging. Just don't delay getting treatment. Using hearing aids or correcting vision problems, such as by having cataracts removed, can slow one's rate of cognitive decline.



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## CRYPTO

# Sam Bankman-Fried's D.C. charm offensive

BY ANDREW R. CHOW

This essay is an excerpt from *Cryptomania*, the newly released book from TIME technology correspondent Andrew R. Chow, which chronicles the pandemic-era rise and fall of crypto, and of mogul Sam Bankman-Fried

IN 2022, IT WAS HARD TO WALK AROUND WASHINGTON without seeing Sam Bankman-Fried's face. While the press often praised him for his humility, the founder and CEO of the crypto exchange FTX plastered ads of himself all over the city, and particularly in areas where congressional staffers might walk to work, like Union Station. Although Sam still lived in the Bahamas in order to avoid regulation, he was shuttling from Nassau to Washington, D.C., every week or two to meet with lawmakers and regulators, making a power play for the nation's capital.

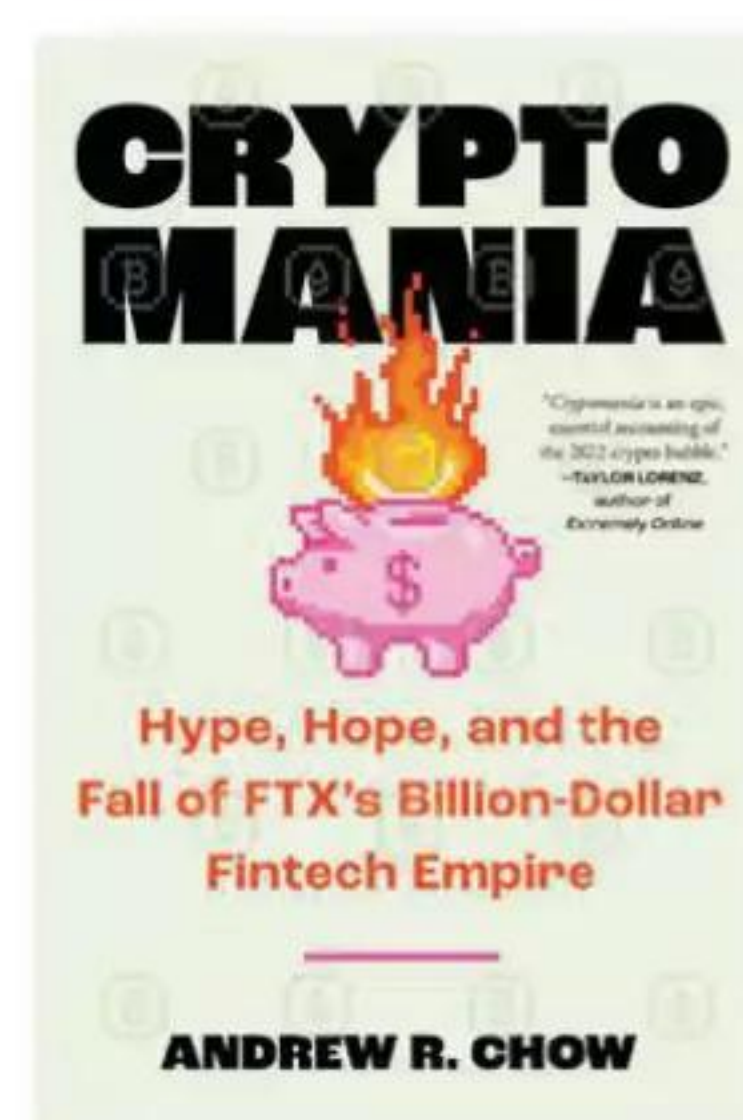
After FTX's crash, theories would fly about Sam's larger designs on Washington. Some speculated that he had been angling to move FTX back to U.S. soil and carve out concessions to make it the top crypto company in the country. Others believed he was laying the groundwork for a political career himself. A less charitable theory was that he hoped to pre-emptively seek federal leniency for the illegal activity he knew he was already committing.

Whatever Sam's long-term goals were, he made his short-term aims plenty evident: he stumped for a friendlier regulatory climate for crypto companies in the U.S., so that he could sell more crypto products to Americans. Getting favorable legislation seemed feasible in 2022, given how much national excitement there was about crypto—and how little lawmakers actually understood it.

Sam's approach to Washington was two-pronged. The first was a charm offensive, involving high-profile hearing appearances and closed-door meetings with members of Congress and regulatory officials. The second was a donations blitzkrieg for crypto-friendly candidates, which was led by Sam's younger brother Gabe. Sam's money and sudden omnipresence in Washington sent shock waves through the Democratic Party establishment. "Washington is a place where the power structure is more or less set," says a former member of the Treasury Department. "And Sam disrupted it."

**SAM TESTIFIED IN FRONT** of Congress multiple times, with his first appearance in December 2021. At this point, around \$15 billion in assets were traded daily on FTX, and its market share was rapidly growing. Sam used his testimony to argue both that crypto improved upon traditional finance, and that FTX improved upon crypto. He criticized the way that the 2008 financial crisis had been precipitated by "bilateral bespoke nonreported transactions" piled up onto each other, lacing the entire financial system with hidden risk. FTX, in contrast, boasted a "risk engine":

Bankman-Fried testifies during a Senate committee hearing on Feb. 9, 2022



a suite of automated tools to minimize unforeseen losses and weed out bad actors in the system, Sam claimed. He added that if too many customers made bad bets, FTX had a \$250 million insurance fund to absorb customer losses. FTX's financial cushion and its cutting-edge technology, he argued, would "ensure a customer without losses can redeem its assets from the platform on demand."

Many lawmakers found his speeches persuasive. "It sounds like you're doing a lot to make sure there is no fraud or other manipulation," Representative Tom Emmer, who was elected as the GOP's majority whip in 2022, told him at the December 2021 hearing.

"There were a lot of stars in people's eyes watching that: folks on both the Democratic and Republican sides that were very taken with SBF," says congressional staffer Devina Khanna.

But virtually none of the above descriptions about Sam's business, which he made under oath, were true. While he attempted to portray FTX as the opposite of the shadow banks of the 2000s, he was mirroring their







actions by leveraging and repackaging dubious and risky assets. Although FTX's risk engine was innovative and mostly effective, Sam knew that a single account was exempt from ever getting auto-liquidated: his own trading firm, Alameda Research. That team, which was run by Sam's girlfriend Caroline Ellison, could take a virtually unlimited line of credit from FTX without getting flagged for internal review, and use it to make bigger and bigger trades. At this point, Alameda was already secretly borrowing billions from FTX's pool of money. The insurance fund that Sam advertised was fake too. While the FTX website stated at the time that the platform had \$250 million stashed away for a rainy day, that number was completely made up, and generated by a bit of code.

**AS SAM STUMPED** in front of Senators, he enlisted his younger brother Gabe to help bring new crypto-friendly faces to Congress's halls. The brothers spun up a nonprofit called Guarding Against Pandemics and an affiliated super PAC called Protect

**'It was a lot more silly than strategic: more Veep than West Wing.'**

—A D.C. OPERATIVE,  
ON BANKMAN-FRIED'S  
POLITICAL DONATIONS

Our Future. Sam quickly funneled \$27 million to the PAC, whose ostensible goal was to promote candidates who prioritized antipandemic research and prevention. "He thought it was very effective, that you could get very high returns in terms of influence by spending relatively small amounts of money," Ellison, who later pled guilty to fraud charges, testified about Sam's fundraising.

At first, Protect Our Future did support candidates who seemed equipped to guard against future pandemics. But D.C. insiders say that late in the campaign cycle, a clear pattern emerged of the Bankman-Frieds' donating based not on ideology, but on likelihood of victory. "They switched to 'We'll give \$500,000 to anyone who already has this locked up—that way, they'll be forever in our debt,'" a D.C. operative tells me. "There was no ideological consistency to who they gave money to in the last four to five months. It was a lot more silly than strategic: more *Veep* than *West Wing*."

Sam ended the 2022 election cycle as the third biggest individual public Democratic donor of the midterms, trailing only Michael Bloomberg and George Soros. But he was secretly funding Republicans too. "We will be heavily putting money to weed out anti-crypto Dems for pro-crypto Dems and anti-crypto Repubs for pro-crypto Repubs," Ryan Salame, an FTX executive and one of Sam's closest allies in the Bahamas, wrote to a confidant in a text.

FTX's financial-influence campaign largely unfolded over a Signal group chat. Sam was on the chat, as was FTX's top engineer Nishad Singh, who fronted \$14 million in donations to Democrats—even though he grumbled in messages about having to support "explicitly-woke stuff" like the LGBT Victory Fund. Salame, in turn, flowed more than \$23 million to Republicans in 2022, including the maximum to Tom Emmer. (FTX also doled out \$200,000 to New York Republican Michelle Bond, a Donald Trump Jr.-endorsed congressional candidate who happened to be Salame's girlfriend.) Financial-forensics experts would later trace much of the money for political donations—ostensibly given by Singh and Salame—back to Alameda bank accounts, and then back to transfers pulled from FTX customer deposits.

Sam was playing both sides: a logical end point to his nihilist approach. The ideological principles of the candidates he gave money to didn't matter. All that mattered was that he continued to amass power himself. Many other crypto executives saw Sam's successes in Washington and followed his lead: more than \$26 million flowed from crypto companies to political races in 2021 and the first quarter of 2022, outpacing spending from Big Pharma, Big Tech, and the defense industry.

All in all, an astounding 196 members of Congress—more than a third of all Senators and Representatives—received cash from Sam Bankman-Fried or other senior executives at FTX. And Sam announced that he had only scratched the surface of his largesse: that he was aiming for a \$1 billion "soft ceiling" for the 2024 election.

A new kingmaker had arrived in Washington, it seemed. But by the end of the year, Sam Bankman-Fried would be in handcuffs. □





WORLD

# Bibi At War

THE EMBATTLED PREMIER ON GAZA,  
IRAN, AND ISRAEL'S PERILOUS FUTURE

BY ERIC CORTELLESSA/JERUSALEM





*Benjamin Netanyahu in  
the Prime Minister's office  
in Jerusalem on Aug. 4*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAOLO PELLEGRIN—MAGNUM PHOTOS FOR TIME



# For the past 10 months, Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to apologize for leaving Israel vulnerable to Hamas' Oct. 7 terrorist attack.

After the deaths of 1,200 people and the abduction of hundreds more, a traumatized Israeli public heard abject admissions of responsibility from the heads of the Israel Defense Forces and Shin Bet, the country's domestic security service, but none from Netanyahu, who had been Prime Minister for almost a year when the attack happened, and had presided over a more than 10-year strategy of tacit acceptance of Hamas rule in Gaza. His only apology was for a social media post blaming his own security chiefs for failing to foil the assault. So, early in a 66-minute conversation with TIME on Aug. 4 in the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem, the question is, Would he make an apology?

"Apologize?" he asks back. "Of course, of course. I am sorry, deeply, that something like this happened. And you always look back and you say, Could we have done things that would have prevented it?"

For Netanyahu, who first occupied the dowdy Kaplan Street offices in 1996, it's a fraught question. Through a combination of electoral vicissitudes, sweeping regional changes, and his own political gifts, his almost 17-year cumulative tenure is longer than that of anyone else who has led Israel, a country only two years older than he is. Over that span, Netanyahu's political endurance has been built around one consistent argument: that he's the only leader who can ensure Israel's safety.

But in the wake of the worst slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, with more than 40,000 Gazans dead in the ensuing conflict, Israel under Netanyahu is not blessed with peace but besieged by war. As we speak, the country is on edge for an expected aerial attack from Iran, the second in four months. Shops are shuttered, and pedestrians

stay within sprinting distance of bomb shelters. The fighting is ongoing in Gaza, with more than 100 hostages still held by Hamas. Much to the frustration of the Biden Administration, Netanyahu still has not articulated a credible plan to end the war or a vision for how the Israelis and the Palestinians can peacefully coexist. Instead, he's bracing for escalating conflict on even more fronts: in the north with Hezbollah in Lebanon; in the Gulf with the Houthis in Yemen; and most of all, with Israel's nemesis Iran. "We're facing not merely Hamas," Netanyahu says. "We're facing a full-fledged Iranian axis, and we understand that we have to organize ourselves for broader defense."

The story of how Israel arrived at this precarious moment is entwined with Netanyahu's personal ambitions and vulnerabilities. In the months before Oct. 7, Israeli society was sundered by his support of right-wing legislation diminishing the power of the Supreme Court. The collective trauma of the Hamas attack may have brought Jewish Israelis together, but deepened doubts about their Prime Minister, with 72% saying he should resign, either now or after the war, according to a July poll for Israel's most watched television station. Abroad, the toll of the Gaza war can be tallied in Israel's increasing isolation: arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant sought by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes; American college campuses convulsed by anti-Israel protests, the largest of their kind since Vietnam; antisemitism rising around the globe.

On his first trip overseas since the war's outbreak, Netanyahu addressed a joint session of Congress on July 25 in hopes of reinforcing his nation's most



essential alliance. But behind the standing ovations, the advice from both ends of the political spectrum was unanimous: President Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and former President Donald Trump all said it was time to end the war in Gaza.

Netanyahu's response? Two days after arriving home, without a heads-up to the White House, a bomb almost certainly planted by Israel killed Hamas' most prominent negotiator in a heavily guarded government guest house in Tehran. With every passing week, critics raise further alarms that Netanyahu is drawing out the Gaza campaign for personal political reasons, arguing that a deal for a permanent cease-fire that would bring home the remaining hostages would also open the door to elections that could result in his removal from office. Biden himself told TIME





on May 28 that there was “every reason to draw that conclusion,” and in Israel, many do. “Netanyahu is focused on his longevity in power more than the interests of the Israeli people or the State of Israel,” says former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who for four years served as his Defense Minister. “It will take half a generation to repair the damage that Netanyahu has caused in the last year.”

A defiant Netanyahu, 74, calls these charges a “canard.” He insists the goal in Gaza must be a victory so decisive that when the fighting stops, Hamas can make no claim to govern in Palestinian territories or pose a threat to Israel. Otherwise, he argues, it will only condemn his country to a future of more massacres at the hands of enemies who want to eliminate the world’s only Jewish state. With the conflict

*Protesters demanding a hostage-release deal outside Netanyahu’s Jerusalem residence on Aug. 3*

expanding, Netanyahu says he is puncturing the confidence of every other element of Iran’s “axis of resistance,” a network of nonstate actors throughout the Middle East with a collective arsenal of rockets trained on Israel.

If the war in Gaza widens into a regional conflict, the consequences for Israel and the world would be dangerously unpredictable. The U.S. and the West risk being dragged into another Middle East quagmire. Israelis increasingly worry that the war supposedly launched to save Israel will imperil it. Among their most profound fears is that the cycle of violence and the perception it shapes of Israel for

the next generation will cause lasting damage to its survival and its soul.

For Netanyahu, who says he’s waging an existential war, it’s a risk he recognizes, but one he’s willing to take. “Being destroyed has bigger implications about Israel’s security,” he says. “I’d rather have bad press than a good obituary.”

**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken flew to Tel Aviv to meet Israeli officials in the Kirya, the towering office complex from which the Prime Minister and his Cabinet were conducting the war. Israel’s bombardment of Gaza had already caused an estimated 30,000 deaths, a count by the Hamas-led Health Ministry that doesn’t distinguish between militants and civilians, but is accepted by the U.N. and the White House. Nearly 2 million



Palestinians had been displaced. It was a humanitarian catastrophe inflaming the world, and Blinken's message to Netanyahu was simple: Wind down the war, you have achieved your objective, Hamas can no longer carry out another Oct. 7.

"That's not our objective," Netanyahu replied, according to a source familiar with the exchange. "Our objective is to completely destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities." The larger, more essential goal, Netanyahu argued, was restoring Israel's principle of deterrence. The price of Oct. 7 had to be sufficiently high for Hamas that any other power considering an attack on Israel would fear similar destruction. While Israel faces a cynical enemy that endangers its own people to delegitimize the Jewish state, the price of that full-throttle approach was already evident: the civilian death toll was mounting, Palestinians struggled to access basic health care, and there was a shortage of food and water. The calamity spawned accusations of a disproportionate counterattack. "This is collective punishment," says Rashid Khalidi, a Columbia University professor who worked on Palestinian peace negotiations in the 1990s. "You don't punish civilians for what Hamas did."

Netanyahu dismisses those allegations out of hand. "We've gone out of our way to enable humanitarian assistance since the beginning of the war," he says, citing Israel's delivery of aid through food trucks and air drops.

To some extent, Netanyahu has been preparing to fight this war his entire adult life. His political career began as a telegenic diplomat explaining Israel's positions on U.S. television during Iran's takeover of the U.S. embassy in 1979, and he was elected Prime Minister three times pitching himself as "Mr. Security." That the worst terrorist attack in Israel's history happened on his watch was a deep wound, forcing a reckoning in Israel over the strategic policy decisions he had championed for decades.

The first was allowing Qatar to send funds into the Gaza Strip. Hamas had come to power first by the ballot box (in 2006 elections promoted by U.S. President George W. Bush) and a year later by force of arms, amid factional

fighting. Israel first responded by enforcing a blockade on the enclave. But under a policy embraced over the past 10 years by Netanyahu, billions in Qatari cash was allowed into Gaza. The infrastructure it financed included many miles of tunnels.

"Hamas wore two hats. It wore a terrorist hat and it wore a governance hat after 2007," says Michael Oren, Netanyahu's ambassador to Washington from 2009 to 2013. "We thought that we could incentivize Hamas to wear the governance hat through large infusions of Qatari cash and by allowing Palestinian workers into Israel. Give Hamas something to lose. That was the idea. But it was wrong."

Others saw a more cynical strategy, to deepen divisions between Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and undermine the prospects for a unified Palestinian state. "He saw Hamas as an asset and the [West Bank-based] Palestinian Authority as a liability," says Barak. "As long as he can hold Hamas alive and kicking and being a threat to Israel, he can easily protect himself against demands from America and from the rest of the world who argued that Israel should look for a way to achieve a breakthrough with the Palestinians."

Netanyahu reportedly said as much at a Likud Party meeting in 2019, according to the Israeli media, but he denies it. Rather, he tells TIME, his approval of Qatari cash infusions was humanitarian: "We wanted to make sure that Gaza has a functioning civilian administration to avoid humanitarian collapse," he says. Moreover, he claims, the money didn't form the basis of Hamas' eventual threat to Israel. "The main issue was the transfer of weapons and ammunition from the Sinai into Gaza," he says. His primary mistake, he says, was acceding to his Security Cabinet's reluctance to wage

**'You don't punish civilians for what Hamas did.'**

—RASHID KHALIDI, FORMER PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATOR



full-on war. "Oct. 7 showed that those who said that Hamas was deterred were wrong," he says during the Aug. 4 interview. "If anything, I didn't challenge enough the assumption that was common to all the security agencies."

Instead, Israel maintained a policy known as mowing the grass—periodic fighting to degrade Hamas' military capability and deter its desire to assault Israel. The 2014 Gaza war, during which Hamas sent forces into Israel via tunnels, lasted 51 days. Early in that round, senior Israeli officials say, Netanyahu's Security Cabinet presented him with a plan to destroy Hamas that estimated the cost in deaths: roughly 10,000 Gazan civilians and nearly 500 Israeli soldiers. "There was no domestic support for such an action," says Netanyahu. "There was certainly no international support for such an action—and you need both."

While Hamas was growing stronger in secret, Israel was making a spectacle of its own division. In January 2023, after Netanyahu returned to power for the third time with a coalition that included far-right parties previously considered too extreme to govern, he backed a radical bill to weaken the judiciary. The plan triggered an immense backlash, with tens of thousands of Israelis protesting every weekend. "You are weakening us, and our enemy is going to see it and we're going to pay the price," former Minister of Defense Benny Gantz warned Netanyahu.

Netanyahu blames the protesters, thousands of whom declared they





wouldn't serve in the military of an Israel with a diminished democratic foundation. "The refusal to serve because of an internal political debate—I think that, if anything, that had an effect," he says.

Amid this tumult, Hamas had been planning to infiltrate Israel by land, air, and sea, and not just for a one-off attack. The plan on Oct. 7 was to secure the south of Israel and keep moving farther into the north, according to two senior Israeli sources who have reviewed Hamas documentation discovered in Gaza. "This was not a plan to wound Israel," says one source who reviewed the documents. "It was planned to be the first step in the operation to destroy Israel entirely."

**ISRAEL'S INVASION** of Gaza began on Oct. 27, when Netanyahu launched a full-scale ground operation with aerial strikes. The offensive came with a cold calculation; because Hamas intentionally embeds its military infrastructure in densely populated areas, the attacks would inevitably inflict wide-scale civilian casualties. For an Israeli public still reeling from Oct. 7, their deaths became a tragic but necessary price to protect the nation-state established after the Holocaust to provide a safe haven for Jews in their ancestral homeland. A Pew poll in May showed fewer than 20% of Israelis thought the country's military went "too far." The press here seldom shows images of civilian deaths. In our interview, Netanyahu says the IDF's "best estimate" is that

the ratio of civilian deaths to military is 1 to 1—extraordinarily low for urban combat. (The U.N. has said that civilians usually account for 90% of casualties in war.)

The hostages remain the focus of domestic attention. In November, Israel and Hamas reached a temporary cease-fire to exchange 105 of them for 240 Palestinian prisoners. When fighting resumed a week later, the humanitarian crisis increasingly became the global focus. Only under intense pressure from the Biden Administration did Netanyahu allow more aid into the Strip. When he prepared to push into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the last refuge both for displaced civilians and Hamas' remaining battalions, Netanyahu also found himself up against the American President who had flown in after Oct. 7 to publicly embrace him.

Israel seemed more internationally isolated than ever before. Most wounding to Netanyahu was a March cover of the *Economist*, which he read growing up in the States, headlined **ISRAEL ALONE**. That, it turns out, was exaggerated. A few weeks later, on April 14, Iran for the first time launched 300 missiles toward Israel, a retaliation for its attack on a diplomatic facility in Damascus. Under Biden's stewardship, the American, British, French, and Arab forces all rushed to Israel's defense.

But two things can be true at once. A government anxious to prevent a full-bore regional conflagration might scramble jets to save Israeli lives while also holding grave reservations about

From left: An airstrike on a school in Deir al-Balah, Gaza, on July 27; mourning Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31

what Israel was doing in Gaza. The war had been going on for six months, and Biden wanted Netanyahu to accept a cease-fire-for-hostage deal that would end it. To Biden's frustration, Netanyahu resisted. He wanted only a temporary pause in the fighting upon the return of the hostages. A longer respite for Hamas stood to cost Netanyahu the support of his far-right governing partners, tanking his fragile coalition. "He's risking his government in having a deal with Hamas," says a senior Israeli official. "Bibi will have a hostage deal only when it suits him politically."

This was the backdrop for Netanyahu's first trip abroad since Oct. 7, to address a joint session of Congress in Washington. The speech was at first opposed by Biden and Democratic congressional leadership, who knew it would exacerbate party tensions over the Administration's support for the war. Nearly 130 Democrats skipped it, including Harris, who as Vice President would traditionally preside over the address.

A visit intended to showcase solidarity with Israel's most essential ally instead underscored what was for Israel a growing partisan divide. In recent years, Democratic voters have grown less supportive of Israel and more sympathetic toward Palestinians,



according to Gallup. The Gaza war had only intensified the trend.

Netanyahu says that's not his fault. "I don't think that the much reported erosion of support among some quarters of the American public is related to Israel," he says. "It's more related to America." He cites a Harvard-Harris survey that in January found that 80% of respondents supported Israel whereas 20% supported Hamas—a significant chunk of support for a terrorist organization. "There's a problem that America has," Netanyahu says. "It's not a problem that Israel has."

The partisan divide on display during his trip offered the canny Israeli Premier an opportunity. After the speech he traveled to Trump's Mediterranean-style Palm Beach mansion to repair his relationship with the billionaire, who remained angry at Netanyahu for backing out of a joint strike on a top Iranian in January 2020, and for congratulating Joe Biden on his election victory. But at Mar-a-Lago, Trump greeted Netanyahu and his wife Sara with open arms, and after their conversation set up a makeshift cabinet meeting around a boardroom table with Netanyahu's top brass and his own.

Perhaps Netanyahu's ultimate metric of success in the U.S. came as he prepared to fly home. On July 27, the centrist Israeli television station Channel 12 released a poll that showed his leading all three of his potential rivals in a hypothetical snap election.

**LESS THAN A DAY** after the meeting with Trump, a Hezbollah rocket launched from Lebanon struck a soccer field in northern Israel, killing 12, mostly children. In retaliation for the soccer-field attack, Israel on July 30 bombed a senior Hezbollah commander in a suburb of Beirut—a rare strike in the Lebanese capital.

Just hours later, news broke that the Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh had been killed in his sleep in Tehran, where he had just attended the inauguration of the new Iranian President. The Iranians accused the Israelis of the hit, which was reportedly delivered via a bomb secreted into an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps guesthouse. Israel has not confirmed or

denied involvement but went on high alert, awaiting the promised Iranian retaliation.

Last April, a wider conflict had been narrowly avoided when Iran responded to an Israeli airstrike that killed an Iranian general with a massive but telegraphed direct attack on Israel that was rebuffed with the help of the allied defenses arranged by the U.S. This time, both sides again professed to want to avoid a broader conflict, even as each encounter tested the line between deterrence and provocation.

If a larger war can indeed be averted, Netanyahu believes he can transcend the infamy of Oct. 7 in two ways, according to those close to him. One is by successfully ridding Gaza of Hamas. The second: cementing a Saudi-Israel normalization deal. This would be

**'Our objective is to completely destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities.'**

—BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

a dramatic expansion of the Abraham Accords forged under Trump, which normalized Israel's ties with four Arab nations. Eviscerating Hamas, then providing the Jewish state a network of alliances in the heart of the Islamic world, would turn a catastrophe into a strategic triumph.

The two goals could intersect in Netanyahu's vague plan for a postwar Gaza. Once Hamas is out of power, he says, he wants to recruit Arab countries to help install a civilian Palestinian governing entity that wouldn't pose a threat to Israel. "I'd like to see a civilian administration run by Gazans, perhaps with the support of regional partners," says Netanyahu. "Demilitarization by Israel, civilian administration by Gaza."

Few Israelis see this as a realistic scenario. "He doesn't have any plan for the

endgame," says Efraim Halevy, a former head of Mossad. "First of all, it took him a long time to admit that there would be an endgame, but he has never published it as a proposition, and what he has published is very flimsy." It also strikes Palestinians as unlikely. "Not unless there's some kind of Palestinian buy-in, and there will not be a buy-in to something that's not Palestinian run," says Khalidi. "Something that's run by the Emirates or any other alternative is not going to fly."

The fates of Israelis and Palestinians remain inextricably intertwined. If Israel does not find a way to peacefully separate from the millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, it faces a future of either absorbing them as citizens and losing its Jewish majority, or depriving them of the rights and freedoms afforded to the Jewish population and losing its democracy.

Netanyahu has no interest in overseeing the creation of a Palestinian state. Rather, he offers a vision of limited pockets of autonomy in Palestinian areas where Israel maintains overriding security control, a version of the situation in the West Bank today. "That's a detraction of sovereign powers," he admits, "there's no question about it." But he also tacitly recognizes the dilemma Israel faces. "I agree we should maintain a Jewish majority, but I think we should do it in democratic means," he says. "That's why I don't want to incorporate the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria as citizens of Israel," referring to the biblical name of the West Bank. "It means that they should run their own lives. They should vote for their own institutions. They should have their own self-governance. But they should not have the power to threaten us."

The Saudis have publicly said Israel needs to be taking steps toward a Palestinian state in order to clinch a normalization deal. But Netanyahu's far-right ruling coalition won't tolerate any move in that direction. Naming Itamar Ben-Gvir as National Security Minister and Belazel Smotrich as Finance Minister is, as Union for Reform Judaism president Rick Jacobs has put it, like a U.S. President welcoming into the Cabinet the KKK. The former cheered on the assassination of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; the latter has said Israel



would be “justified” in starving Palestinians to death but the world won’t let them. Together, they have undertaken a bureaucratic push to eliminate any possibility of Palestinian sovereignty. Smotrich has authorized illegal Israeli outposts in the West Bank and streamlined the approval of settlement activities to expand Israel’s footprint in the occupied territories.

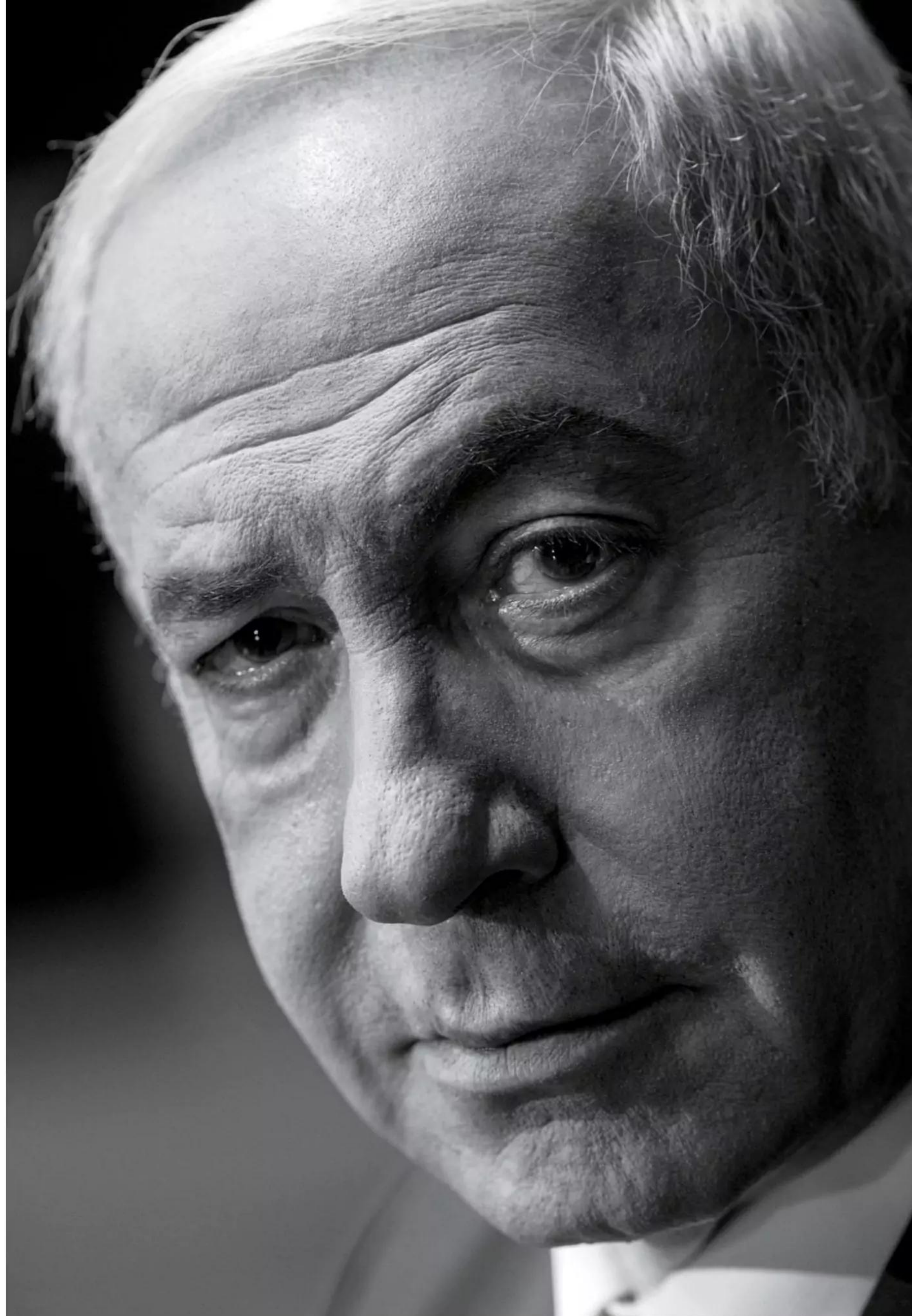
Extremist elements have seeped deeper and deeper into Israeli society since Oct. 7. At the end of July, a Palestinian detainee was rushed to the hospital with severe wounds after being sexually abused with a polelike object. Far-right demonstrators, including some lawmakers, stormed a military base to protest the arrest of nine suspects.

The compounding crises may have Israel at the greatest risk since its founding 76 years ago. Halevy, the former Mossad chief, views the situation ominously. “There were 70 or so years between the temples,” he says, referring to the last two periods the Jewish people had sovereignty in Israel. “You can say that there is a pattern here.”

Amid the gathering sense of existential danger, Netanyahu is, as always, pitching himself as the man who can ensure that Zionism survives the war. “It will, if we win,” he says. “And if we don’t, our future will be in great jeopardy.” Barak, the former Prime Minister, says Netanyahu is in his psychological element. “He genuinely believes that he’s saving Israel,” says Barak. “Not that he’s responsible for one of the worst events in its history.”

Ultimately, the Israeli electorate will determine its future. Though 7 in 10 Israelis say he should step down, the Channel 12 poll showed Netanyahu winning a plurality of 32% support. “There’s a disconnect between public opinion, which is a majority against him in every measure, and his potential for him to stay in power,” says Dahlia Scheindlin, an Israeli pollster. “That doesn’t necessarily translate into losing power in elections.”

The country’s own fraught history suggests Netanyahu’s vulnerability. Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned months after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on the holiest day of the Jewish



Netanyahu in his Jerusalem office on Aug. 4

year, killing over 2,600 Israeli soldiers. Netanyahu has himself been a harsh judge of leaders who oversaw military disasters. In 2008, after a damning report was published on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s management of the 2006 Lebanon war, he called Olmert unfit and incompetent. “The government is in charge of the military, and it failed miserably,” Netanyahu said at the time. “The political echelon and its leader refuse to take responsibility and exhibit personal integrity and leadership—which is what the decisive majority of the public expects them to do.”

In his office on Kaplan Street, TIME asks Netanyahu whether he intends to remain Prime Minister. “I will stay in office as long as I believe I can help lead Israel to a future of security, enduring

security and prosperity,” he replies. And would he say an opposition leader who presided over Israel’s worst security failure should stay in power?

Netanyahu pauses to think through his answer. “It depends what they do,” he says. “What do they do? Are they capable of leading the country in war? Can they lead it to victory? Can they assure that the postwar situation will be one of peace and security? If the answer is yes, they should stay in power.”

“In any case,” he says, “that’s the decision of the people.” —With reporting by VERA BERGENGRUEN/WASHINGTON and LESLIE DICKSTEIN/NEW YORK □



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The reintroduction  
of Kamala Harris  
By Charlotte Alter/  
Philadelphia

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC  
TICKET RALLIES IN  
PHILADELPHIA ON AUG. 6

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THE SOUNDTRACK SUGGESTED A BEYONCÉ CONCERT. The light-up bracelets evoked the Eras Tour. And the exuberant crowd—more than 14,000 strong, lining up in the rain—resembled the early days of Barack Obama. Inside a Philadelphia arena on Aug. 6, Vice President Kamala Harris was greeted with a kind of reception a Democratic presidential candidate hasn't gotten in years. Fans packed into overflow spaces, waving homemade signs made of glitter and glue as drumlines roared. When Harris introduced her new running mate, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, the cheering lasted more than a minute.

If you'd predicted this scene a month ago to anyone following the race, they would never have believed you. But Harris has pulled off the swiftest vibe shift in modern political history. A contest that revolved around the cognitive decline of a geriatric President has been transformed: Joe Biden is out, Harris is in, and a second Donald Trump presidency no longer seems inevitable. Democrats resigned to a "grim death march" toward certain defeat, as one national organizer put it, felt their gloom replaced by a jolt of hope. Harris smashed fundraising records, raking in \$310 million in July. She packed stadiums and dominated TikTok, offering a fresh message focused on the future over the past. Volunteers signed up in droves. Trump's widening leads across the battleground states evaporated. Over the span of a few weeks in late July and early August, Harris became a political phenomenon. "Our campaign is not just a fight against Donald Trump," she told the cheering crowd in Philadelphia. "Our campaign is a fight for the future."

Where has this Kamala Harris been all along? For years, Democratic officials questioned her

political chops, pundits mocked her word salads, and her polling suggested limited appeal. Her performance in the 2020 presidential primary was wooden, and her turn as Biden's No. 2 did little to inspire confidence. Even this summer, as party insiders chattered about possible replacements if Biden stepped aside, "it was explicit from some of the major donors that she can't win," says Amanda Litman, the co-founder of Run for Something, an organization that trains young Democrats to run for office. "They didn't think people were ready to elect someone like her."

Judging from the past few weeks, Harris' own party underestimated her. Maybe the crowded 2020 primary just wasn't the right race for Harris to showcase her talents; maybe the vice presidency wasn't the right role. Suddenly, she seems matched to the moment: a former prosecutor running against a convicted felon, a defender of abortion rights running against the man who helped overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a next-generation Democrat running against a 78-year-old Republican. Perhaps above all, she has given Americans the one thing they overwhelmingly told pollsters they wanted: a credible alternative to the two unpopular old men who have held the job for the past eight long years.



Harris may still be the underdog. Trump has arguably the clearer path to 270 electoral votes and an edge on the issues that voters say are most important to them. Harris will have to answer for the Biden Administration's record, including on inflation and border security. Republicans are casting her as a coastal elite, pointing to positions she took in the 2020 primary—arguing for gun buybacks, a ban on fracking, and an overhaul of the health-insurance system—that may indeed be too liberal to win over many of the swing voters who decide elections. Harris has yet to do a single substantive interview or to explain her policy shifts. (Her campaign denied a request for an interview for this story.) She has to repair ruptures in the party coalition, galvanizing the Black, Hispanic, Arab American, and young voters who migrated away from Biden. Though her early polling numbers are far better than Biden's were, she lags his 2020 support with some key demographic groups she needs to win.

Harris has less than 90 days to prove that she can convert the momentum of her successful launch into a tough, smart operation capable of beating a former President with a dedicated base of support and a knack for commanding the stage. She inherited a campaign infrastructure and policy record from her predecessor, but the energy is all hers. Picking Walz as a running mate over more conventional choices signals

PREVIOUS PAGES: AFP/GETTY IMAGES; THESE PAGES: BIDEN AND HARRIS: OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; ROUNDTABLE: ANNA MONEVMAKER—GETTY IMAGES; TRUMP RALLY: JOE RAEDLE—GETTY IMAGES



a belief that this race is as much about feelings as it is about fundamentals. Harris’ brand shift—the happy-warrior attitude, the viral memes, the eye roll at Republican “weirdos”—has already done what no Trump opponent has ever been able to do: snatch the spotlight away from him.

**SHE MAY SEEM** like an overnight sensation, but Harris’ moment was years in the making. Quietly, her small team of top aides had been laying the groundwork for a future presidential run. After the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision, the Vice President added reproductive rights to her portfolio. Abortion was never a comfortable issue for Biden, a devout Catholic, but it was a natural fit for his No. 2. Harris believed that with *Roe* gone, Republicans would turn their sights to restricting both birth control and IVF. In the months after *Dobbs*,

dropped out on July 21 and quickly endorsed Harris, it was instantly pressed into service. The Vice President—clad in a Howard University sweatshirt, munching pizza with anchovies—spent the next 10 hours on the phone, dialing delegates and wrangling endorsements. A day later, the nomination was all but hers. Even though other presidential hopefuls had ties to swing states or big donors, “the list was the thing that we had that they didn’t,” says a top aide. “It wasn’t a fairy godmother waving a magic wand.”

Harris’ ability to sew up the nomination so quickly was a triumph of work ethic and political dexterity that foreshadowed what was to come. “To consolidate the Democratic Party in a matter of hours, to do as many visible events and establish that presence without putting a foot wrong, is a feat,” says Pete Buttigieg, the Transportation Secretary who ran against Harris for the 2020 nomination and was a finalist to become her running mate. “I don’t think anybody expected her to be so flawless.”

With Biden no longer atop the ticket, the moribund Democratic grassroots came to life. Harris was capable of delivering a message that never felt quite right under Clinton or Biden: that theirs was the party

of the future, and Trump was of the past. Her campaign raised \$200 million in the first week, in what it said was the best 24 hours of any candidate in presidential-campaign history. More than 38,000 people registered on Vote.org in the 48 hours after she became the presumptive nominee, eclipsing the voter-registration surge encouraged by Taylor Swift last year. Within a week, Harris erased Trump’s polling dominance in key states, turning a burgeoning landslide into a dead heat.

“Elections come down to vibes, and Kamala has got the vibes right now,” says David Hogg, co-founder of the Gen Z political organi-

zation Leaders We Deserve. After spending his entire political career organizing against Trump and his allies, Hogg explains, it felt good to finally have someone to vote *for*. “People are feeling the type of energy they felt during the Obama campaign,” says Michigan state senator Darrin Camilleri, who spends his weekends door-knocking in his competitive district south of Detroit. “It feels different than with Hillary, different than with Biden.”

Celebrities like Charli XCX and Megan Thee Stallion came out in support of Harris. Speaking in a packed airplane hangar in Detroit, UAW president Shawn Fain called her a “badass woman.” The campaign’s new Harris-Walz camo hats sold out within half an hour. Grassroots groups are seeing an explosion in fundraising and volunteer sign-ups. “My niece, who called Biden ‘Genocide Joe,’ called me to say, ‘Auntie, I want to do something,’” recalls LaTosha Brown, co-founder of Black Voters Matter.

The shift is perhaps most visible in the digital sphere. While millions of hardcore Democrats would crawl over broken glass to keep Trump



HARRIS AND BIDEN AT THEIR FIRST JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE IN AUGUST 2020



THE VICE PRESIDENT OVERSEES A DISCUSSION ON REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN 2022

A SIGN TARGETS HARRIS AT A TRUMP RALLY IN ATLANTA ON AUG. 3

she traveled the U.S., talking about abortion rights as a matter of “reproductive freedom.” As far back as the 2022 midterms, aides say, she argued for making this the core of the party’s national message, even as the White House focused on jobs and the economy.

During those travels, Harris’ team assembled a spreadsheet of allies, power brokers, and potential delegates to tap if and when the time came. Every photo line, every VIP invitation, every clutch with labor leaders, every meeting with key constituencies was filed away. The goal, advisers say, was to ensure there would be allies on every delegate slate in every state in the nation. “We had a list,” says one top aide, “and we checked it twice.”

The list was intended for 2028. But when Biden



from re-election, less reliable voters in Gen Z are especially attuned to online trends. For months, President Biden's online supporters have been on the defensive about his support for Israel's war against Hamas. Comments about Gaza flooded pro-Biden content posted to social platforms, making it difficult to create what digital strategists call a "permission structure" to support him. To many, it evoked the online mobs who would mock Clinton supporters in 2016, preventing her from building traction on social media. "In 2016, if you wanted to be an online supporter of Hillary Clinton, you did it in a private Facebook group," says Litman. "In 2024, you blast it on TikTok, and you're part of the K-Hive and you make your username the coconut tree."

**EVEN IF WASHINGTON** was taken by surprise, the energetic fighter of the past two weeks matches the Harris whom allies say they have known for years. Louise Renne, a former San Francisco city attorney, recalls that when Harris took over the city's interest in adoption cases in the DA's office, she brought an armful of teddy bears to court on her first day. Andrea Dew Steele, a donor-adviser who snacked on wine and cheese with Harris as they typed up her first political bio sheet for her 2003 campaign for San Francisco DA, remembers Harris sitting outside grocery stores with an ironing board stacked with campaign literature. Those who made it through her 2020 primary recall that after she dropped out, she joined the last of her staff in a dance party in the campaign headquarters.

Harris' early allies in California may have seen glimpses of Barack Obama, but her turn on the national stage has seemed more Selina Meyer. After a splashy kickoff in 2019, the Harris 2020 campaign stalled, then sputtered out. Aides say she took advice from too many different advisers offering conflicting guidance. Her record as a prosecutor was unwieldy baggage for a Democratic primary shadowed by a movement for racial justice. In a contest defined by Bernie Sanders on one side and Biden on the other, she never found her lane. Her operation was plagued with mismanagement and infighting. Harris seemed tentative and insecure, terrified of putting a foot wrong. "We did a disservice to her in 2020," admits Bakari Sellers, a state co-chair on that campaign. "We Bubble-Wrapped her." Enthusiasm waned; the money dried up. She dropped out long before the first votes were cast in the Iowa caucuses.

**'WE DID A DISSERVICE TO HER IN 2020. WE BUBBLE-WRAPPED HER.'**

—BAKARI SELLERS, A STATE CO-CHAIR FOR HARRIS IN 2020



Her early months as VP were checkered too. Big interviews went poorly; Harris seemed ill-prepared and unsteady on her feet. Biden reportedly vented to a friend that she was a "work in progress." He saddled her with a portfolio of difficult, thankless work, like addressing the root causes of the flow of undocumented immigrants from Central America's Northern Triangle. By 2023, Harris had the lowest approval ratings for a Vice President in history. "It's always hard for the Vice President, because the President is the one setting the policy, taking the responsibility," says Representative Adam Schiff, a California Democrat and close ally of Harris. "And historically, Vice Presidents have often

taken on the work that the President doesn't want to do." Another Democrat puts it more bluntly: "They set her up to fail from day one."

One challenge for Harris has been the people around her. Over the years, a rotating cast of senior staff has clouded her message and raised questions about her abilities as a manager. "She needs a few political consiglieres in her life. She doesn't have a North Star guiding her," says one Democratic strategist. "She has made novice political moves that the political elite and the pundits have glommed onto, that have pushed the narrative that she's not ready for prime time."

That narrative has been out of date for some time, according to allies who have worked with her and watched her closely. "To the extent anyone was paying attention, they saw this negative stuff amplified and dialed up by the right. Then there stopped being coverage of her," says





HARRIS, IN PHILADELPHIA ON AUG. 6, QUICKLY GALVANIZED THE DEMOCRATIC BASE

a close adviser. The caricature of Harris, the adviser says, became “frozen in time. Meanwhile, the VP continued her work leading on a bunch of important issues. But people weren’t really tracking that.” Longtime allies argue that many of her Senate priorities—on criminal-justice reform, on racial equity, on maternal health—became Administration priorities. Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, another former 2020 presidential rival, says that over the past three years, Harris has mastered the art of “arm twisting” required to pass major legislation and become a “global diplomat” championing Democratic goals. “She has gone,” Booker says, “from being a Padawan to a Jedi master.”

Yet if Harris was widely underestimated, it’s also true that her circumstances have radically changed. Success in politics is situational. Harris no longer has to compete with more than 20 other Democrats for attention on the campaign trail, or contort herself to appease liberal pieties to win over the party’s base. She no longer has to be a loyal deputy to the President who calls all the shots. Now the moment is finally hers.

**REPUBLICANS ADMIT HARRIS** will be harder to beat than a diminished Biden. But they believe the candidate riding high the past few weeks will soon, under sustained attack, come down to earth. “If she runs the same kind of campaign she ran in

2019 and 2020, her campaign will collapse and Donald Trump will waltz into the White House,” Republican pollster Whit Ayres says. “On the other hand, if she has learned as much as her allies and friends say she has in the last four years, she will give Trump a real run for his money.”

Harris campaign officials say they remain focused on the seven key battleground states—Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. With Harris atop the ticket, those states “are even more in play for us, stronger for us than they might have been otherwise,” says Dan Kanninen, the campaign’s battleground director. Harris is more popular with younger, Black, and Latino voters than Biden was when he dropped out of the race, according to polling, which puts her in a stronger position to win the Sun Belt states. At the same time, she may be losing ground with older white voters, which makes her more vulnerable in the trio of “Blue Wall” states—Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—that form that core of the Democrats’ Electoral College strategy. To shore up those states, Harris is leaning on her major labor endorsements and making multiple visits to the upper Midwest.

Harris inherited Biden’s campaign infrastructure, including more than 260 outposts across the battleground states. In Nevada, the Harris campaign has 13 field offices to Trump’s one; in Pennsylvania, it has 36 coordinated offices to Trump’s three, according to a campaign memo. In the first 12 days of her campaign, Harris supporters placed 2.3 million phone calls and made 172,000 house visits. While battleground organizers are knocking on swing voters’ doors, the campaign’s digital strategy is designed partly around “reaching hard-to-reach voters and convincing them to choose between our candidate and the couch,” says deputy campaign manager Rob Flaherty. The avalanche of viral memes about Harris, the enthusiastic TikTok videos, and the massive Zoom calls of devoted supporters (Black Women for Harris, White Dudes for Harris, Latino Men for Harris) have made this task easier. “That’s the kind of enthusiasm that money can’t buy,” Flaherty says.

Even so, many Democrats still believe Trump’s advantages will be difficult to overcome. “I’m paranoid,” says Representative Debbie Dingell of Michigan. “We still have to make sure that we are talking in the union halls and talking to veterans [in the way] that Joe Biden has done.”

But Harris’ moment also comes after eight years of transformation and triumph for American women. After Clinton’s stinging defeat in 2016, women flooded the streets in the largest protest march in U.S. history, then formed a massive grassroots electoral movement that helped Democrats overperform in most elections since. #MeToo reshaped the culture; *Dobbs* reshaped the electorate. Mass enthusiasm for a woman is nothing new: Harris’ run comes just a year after the blockbuster summer of *Barbie*, Beyoncé, and Swift. This time around, there is less hand-wringing over whether a woman is electable. “The attack lines from the Republicans are going to be on race and gender, and those are going to work to her advantage,” says Ashley Etienne, a former communications director for the Vice President. “All that was baggage is now an asset.”

Whether Harris can sustain her early success is an open question. What’s clear is that she has changed the trajectory of the election. “The whole vibe just shifted. We were looking at two candidates nobody was that excited about,” explains Leanne Weiner, 39, who wore a CHILDLESS CAT LADIES FOR HARRIS T-shirt as she waited in line for chicken fingers at the massive Philadelphia rally in front of another fan in a BLASIANS FOR HARRIS shirt. “Now there’s a new energy, a new force, an ability to pull in people who might be unsure.” —With reporting by LESLIE DICKSTEIN and JULIA ZORTHIAN/NEW YORK and BRIAN BENNETT, PHILIP ELLIOTT, and NIK POPLI/WASHINGTON □





SOCIETY

THE  
Pursuit  
OF  
Happiness

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A NEW STARTUP RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT  
HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRY TO OPTIMIZE SPIRITUALITY

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BY NAINA BAJEKAL /  
APPLEGATE, CALIF.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
JUSTIN MAXON FOR TIME







# Nick Cammarata has always been unusually happy.

The 31-year-old AI safety researcher had a good childhood, but it wasn't just that; situations that made others depressed seemed to roll off him. "I think I was probably happier than 99% of people. It's just kind of unfair luck," he says. "I figured maybe what I had was as good as it gets."

Then, in 2021, as part of an effort to investigate whether life could get even better, Cammarata discovered the jhanas. These eight advanced meditative states, characterized by deep concentration and blissful absorption, have been practiced for thousands of years but were long considered the domain of mystics and monks with decades of training. Cammarata, however, taught himself to enter these states after around 1,000 hours of solo meditation practice. "I was shocked that it was possible to get this thing you turn on in 10 seconds and just get joy for five hours straight," he says. "Nobody talks about it."

So he started to. In the past few decades, a handful of American Buddhist teachers had published books and led retreats on the jhanas, but knowledge hadn't spread much beyond meditation circles. Cammarata's enthusiastic tweets about the jhanas got the attention of many in the Bay Area, fueling a growing interest in the ancient practices. Now neuroscientists are researching these altered states, more meditation teachers are guiding people into them, and a much hyped startup called Jhourney—where Cammarata is a minor investor—claims most of its participants can reach them in under 40 hours of meditation.

The mainstreaming of the jhanas may represent the next frontier of the mindfulness movement, which has taken hold in American schools, hospitals, and workplaces and, propelled by apps like Calm and Headspace, become a billion-dollar

industry. Mindfulness has been shown to minimize stress, improve focus, and help with pain management. It's perhaps no coincidence that this surge in interest comes as mental-health issues are soaring globally, and as the U.S.—the richest country in the world—has dropped out of the top 20 nations for happiness, largely because of a decline among under 30s. Dr. Matthew Sacchet, director of the Meditation Research Program at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, believes the destabilization of the pandemic, as well as other global challenges, has contributed to a "crisis of meaning" that makes advanced meditation increasingly appealing.

Stephen Zerfas, the 32-year-old CEO and co-founder of Jhourney, describes the startup as a well-being moon shot. "There's hundreds of millions of people that have experienced meditation, and for them, it's largely incremental," he tells me at the Alembic, a meditation center in Berkeley, Calif., in early May. "Far less than 1% of them talk about it as absolutely transformative."

Many in Silicon Valley see the jhanas as offering a tantalizing promise: a way to reprogram one's internal software to access bliss on demand. If done responsibly, the upside could be enormous. Most of us tend to outsource our happiness to external sources—imagining that if we could just get rid of one thing bothering us or obtain another thing we want, we'd finally be happy. Jonas Mago, a cognitive neuroscientist studying the jhanas at McGill University, argues that this mindset overlooks our innate capabilities: "We don't recognize that we have the profound power of shifting our own states by doing introspective work."

Now, a new industry around the jhanas is taking shape—one that must navigate thorny tensions between spirituality and market forces. Jhourney's approach isn't without controversy. Some critics question whether the company has the expertise to guide retreats safely; others worry about repackaging rich practices as self-help techniques. "Jhourney is saying they're not Buddhists and yet they're using a Buddhist term," says Tina Rasmussen, an American meditation teacher. "And that's because it sells. If they're really trying to help people, why are they charging so much?"

On a cool evening in May, I join 42 others in a conference room at the Applegate Jesuit Retreat Center in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. As the room falls silent, five members of the Jhourney team—all young white guys—begin recounting how they went from viewing meditation as a chore to discovering real joy through the practice. As with others here, my own history with meditation is inconsistent at best. As a child with bad eczema, I sometimes used a *jaap mala* (a loop of prayer beads) to distract myself from the urge





to scratch, inspired by my Hindu grandfather who meditated for an hour before dawn each day. But as an adult, my attempts to meditate usually devolved into rumination. I've come here with the same goal as everyone else: to learn how to tap into mind-blowing states of joy—in under a week.

**IN 2018, REELING** from simultaneous break-ups with a co-founder and a girlfriend, Zervas signed up for a 10-day silent meditation retreat. “I quickly learned things could get worse,” he tells the room at Applegate with a grim laugh. After eight days of migraines, he changed techniques and stumbled into the most euphoric experience he'd had in a year. “If this was replicable,” he recalls thinking, “this changes everything.”

For the next year, he meditated daily and tried to hack his way back into that state. It wasn't until 2021 that he came across *Right Concentration*, a jhana instruction book by American meditation teacher Leigh Brasington, and found a framework that seemed to explain his experiences.

Though they are most comprehensively

^  
A woman meditates during a high-end Jhourney retreat in June at The Land in Sonoma County, California

‘If they’re really trying to help people, why are they charging so much?’

—TINA RASMUSSEN,  
CO-AUTHOR OF  
PRACTICING THE JHANAS

delineated in the Theravada Buddhism school of Southeast Asia, the jhanas predate the Buddha and find parallels across contemplative traditions, from Carmelite nuns to Sufi mystics. According to the *suttas* (core Buddhist scriptures), the Buddha spontaneously entered the first jhana as a child some 2,500 years ago and later gave precise instructions on how to cultivate these progressively more profound states as part of the path to enlightenment. But over time, the jhanas largely fell out of common practice. And even as Western Buddhist teachers have worked to make them more accessible, mastering jhana still took significant time and dedication. “When I first heard about jhana, the assumption I had was that 30 people in the world could do this and maybe I'd be able to do it in my 80s if I practiced really hard,” says Kathryn Devaney, a neuroscientist, founder of the Alembic, and an adviser to Jhourney.

The goal of dramatically reducing the effort needed to access these states motivated Zervas to quit his software-engineering job at Lyft in 2021 and co-found Jhourney the following year with Alex Gruver, then a management consultant. “It was an insane thing to do,” Zervas says, “to try to replicate this thing that's supposedly been around for a few millennia that nobody has heard of and then try to teach other people.”

The company initially focused on developing neurotech, like a consumer headset, to guide people into jhanas, raising \$750,000 in pre-seed funding. Last fall, however, Zervas and Gruver pivoted to retreats, soliciting feedback from around a dozen Buddhist teachers as they developed their approach. They see themselves not as spiritual leaders teaching the Buddhist dharma, but as “engineers” focused on sharing practical guidance as efficiently as possible. Since October, Jhourney has guided over 400 people through 16 retreats, and claims that more than two-thirds of participants enter jhana regardless of meditation experience. The online retreats cost \$1,100 and in-person ones start at \$1,800, with scholarships available; a higher-end retreat in June cost upwards of \$5,000. The hope is that within a few years, Jhourney could be teaching tens of thousands of people the jhanas each year. “To reach millions, tech intervention will be necessary,” Zervas says.

For inspiration, he looks to the mindfulness movement, which has effectively secularized and scaled meditation techniques through apps and corporate programs. Traditional jhana instruction, which involves intimate teacher-student relationships and intensive retreats, may be harder to mainstream, but Jhourney hopes that interventions can do more than bring those suffering up to a healthy baseline—they can also catapult the ostensibly well-adjusted into unprecedented



levels of thriving. Zerfas compares jhana to an inverted panic attack: instead of anxiety spiraling, positive emotions accentuate one another, leading to intense states of bliss and peace. “If you taught people how to navigate these positive-feedback loops in their own system, it would be almost as valuable as reading and writing,” he argues. “We teach those skills in second grade, so why wouldn’t we teach this?”

**AT MY RETREAT,** Burning Man stickers decorate water bottles and conversations touch on Wim Hof ice baths and psychedelic therapy. Most of the 43 people here—I’m one of only six women—are young, affluent tech workers from the founders’ networks or who hang out on “meditation Twitter,” which skews heavily male. We’re told that Jhourney has taken as many lessons from coding boot camps as it has from meditation retreats. Key messages include work smart, not hard; run your own experiments; keep iterating.

But during a welcome ceremony in the chapel on our first morning, people open up about what brought them here: redefining their relationship to pleasure; showing up for loved ones; navigating a breakup or career transition. Some confess they were hesitant to tell others about their plans, aware that the idea of seeking altered states might seem esoteric or self-indulgent.

I’ve been telling people I’m here “on assignment,” but I quickly realize if I want to access the jhanas, trying to stay detached and analytical isn’t going to work. As I sip a cup of cacao, a giant white Jesus Christ on a crucifix looming above, another word comes to mind: *healing*.

I’m reluctant to admit this, even to myself. While I’m not typically prone to anxiety or depression, the period before the retreat was among the hardest of my life. In the span of 10 months, I’d been diagnosed with severe endometriosis as well as a rare genetic form of diabetes; then, the simple act of tying my shoe led to agony and emergency spinal surgery for a rare condition that could have caused permanent paralysis if not treated quickly enough. For months afterward, I couldn’t exercise, or sit or stand for longer than 30 minutes without discomfort; I’d lost sensation on my left side from the hip down, and no one could tell me if, let alone when, it might fully return. My relationship with my body had become defined almost entirely by pain and frustration.

*Motion is lotion* is what I was told repeatedly during rehab, as movement helps nerves regenerate and signals your body to heal. I took that advice to heart, keeping busy with travel, working long hours, and socializing. People kept congratulating me on how well I was doing. Inside, I felt nothing like my old self.



▲  
Jhourney  
co-founders  
Stephen Zerfas  
and Alex Gruver  
on June 15 in  
Sonoma County,  
California

Critics warn that Jhourney risks reducing a profound contemplative path to a quick fix. Truthfully, that’s what appealed when I first emailed Gruver and Zerfas asking if I could attend a retreat and write about it. I’d already lost countless hours to medical appointments, hospital stays, and simply being in pain. I wanted to feel better, and soon.

At the start of the retreat, I hand in my phone, unplugging from email and the news cycle for the first time in a decade. My days begin with lake-side walks in the morning mist, followed by ecstatic dance at 6:45 a.m. and yoga at 11 a.m. Group meditation sessions bookend each day. Most days I meditate for six to eight hours, lying on a sofa or under the trees listening to birdsong.

But meditation, I discover, isn’t inherently relaxing. Humans aren’t designed to be still; meditation involves rewiring evolutionary instincts to seek pleasure and avoid pain. A retreat forces you to confront your psychology, Devaney says: “It’s really gnarly work—not a day at the spa.”

The first morning, we’re tasked with recalling positive memories as a way to spark the joy that



might eventually lead to jhana. Instead, virtually every time I shut my eyes, I'm met with intense flashbacks from my year of medical crises. That evening, when someone mentions falling asleep during meditation, I'm shocked.

But the meditation works more quickly than I expected. Within a day, the flashbacks have faded and I find myself regularly drifting off. Over time, I stop policing my mind, no longer berating myself if I get distracted; if my inner critic pops up, I visualize putting her in a hammock to lie down. I become more alert to what I enjoy: one morning, during dance, I realize I am no longer having fun, and rather than forcing myself to stay out of some misplaced sense of obligation, I simply leave.

Still, cultivating positive emotions is harder than I anticipated. I find my typical British stoicism, while useful in a crisis, has inadvertently muted my capacity for joy. When I recite mantras like *May I be happy*, an internal voice questions my right to happiness in a world full of suffering. The idea of unearned joy feels almost transgressive, undermining everything I've learned about needing to work hard and accomplish things in order to be happy.

A turning point comes halfway through the retreat, during a forgiveness meditation. Tears flow as I realize how much anger I've been harboring—toward doctors who'd dismissed my symptoms, myself for not seeking help sooner, people in my life who couldn't see my suffering. As I walk by the lake afterward, listening to birds chirping and frogs croaking, I feel the anger flow through me, white and hot and cleansing.

Soon, I find myself more attuned to my body, able to examine whether an emotion feels open (like joy) or closed (like frustration). We are advised to take cold showers and taste hot sauce, to notice when we are bracing against experience rather than surrendering to it. Gradually, I feel the tingles that apparently signal the start of the jhanas, the kind of thing I once might have dismissed as pins and needles. (*Piti* is the term Buddhists use; I think of it as a bubbly golden liquid, like champagne.) But I keep running into resistance, and the doorway to the jhanas shuts.

Of course, I'm not alone in my struggles. "There was an aspect of the Jhourney retreat that felt like you were a Pokémon and they were trying to get you to evolve jhana levels as quickly as possible in a week," one participant tells me. That strikes a chord: as the days pass, I increasingly feel the pressure of being surrounded by goal-oriented people who are succeeding where I am not.

**SUCCEEDING AT WHAT**, exactly? One of the challenges with the jhanas is that as with falling in love, ordinary speech doesn't seem to do them justice.

**'Spiritual teachers, unless they're really advanced, are just plain old human beings.'**

—LEIGH BRASINGTON,  
AUTHOR OF *RIGHT CONCENTRATION*

Analogies abound: getting goose bumps while listening to music; cuddling with a partner after sex; the satisfaction of completing a major project. The initial jhanas, characterized by high-energy experiences, seem to vary dramatically. One Jhourney participant likens the first jhana to the jolt of putting your tongue onto a battery, while another describes a floating sensation so intense that she wondered if her water had been laced with MDMA. There's more consensus about the fourth jhana, however, which seems to be characterized by a deep peace and equanimity, a stark contrast to the internal dissonance most of us are used to in everyday life—thinking about emails while talking to a loved one or worrying about a past conversation while trying to enjoy a party.

Many Buddhists see the jhanas as preparation for deeper meditation leading to awakening, not as ends in themselves. "Jhanas offer a systematic training in letting go," says Shaila Catherine, author of *Focused and Fearless*. "A mark of genuine mastery of jhana is dispassion toward pleasure, not seeking it on demand." But some believe that even for those without loftier spiritual goals, the jhanas can be valuable—helping people "move their emotional set point a little more towards the happy scale," as Brasington puts it.

There are also intense debates about what "counts." Some teachers, like Catherine, say that jhana requires you to remain completely absorbed for long stretches without a single thought arising. Rasmussen, who co-authored *Practicing the Jhanas*, believes Jhourney is teaching pleasurable states that fall short of true jhana, which she compares to steam powerful enough to drive a locomotive. "If people think it's steam when it's water," she says, "that is false advertising."

This is hardly new: for almost as long as people have been practicing the jhanas, they've been arguing over how to define them. Brasington says the disagreement stems partly from varying interpretations of ancient texts and partly from the fact people are inclined to believe their way is the right way. "Spiritual teachers, unless they're really advanced, are just plain old human beings," he says.

While some teachers see "lighter" versions of the jhanas as more practical for modern lives, concerns persist about diluting the term. Jhourney stands by its use of jhana, emphasizing that it's transparent about traditional definitions and helps connect participants with resources and teachers if they want to pursue further practice. "We're just helping people experience more joy when they meditate," Gruver says. "That seems like such an unambiguously good thing to me."

Rui Bao, who works in public education, compares her experience during a February retreat to six to eight months of therapy progress, saying it



felt as though she were “sitting in a circle holding hands and singing kumbaya with all the different parts of myself.” Jake Eaton, a magazine editor, describes a cathartic experience in which he grieved for the turbulence of his childhood while feeling gratitude for the progress he’s made since. Even people who don’t reach jhana can find therapeutic effects, like one man who cried for the first time in 30 years during his Jhourney retreat. And for some, the benefits can be lasting. Startup founder Ruby Yu says since her retreat last fall, her self-critical voice has quietened, she can’t remember the last time she got angry, and she’s much more familiar with joy. “That baseline of unpleasantness is much, much lighter,” says Yu, who is now working with Rasmussen to deepen her practice. “Whether or not it’s what the Buddha was truly talking about in the *suttas*, I don’t care. All I care is that it made meditation a lot easier for me.”

While it’s tempting to think that science will be able to resolve these centuries-old debates, neuroscientists say it’s difficult to define exactly at what point something is or isn’t a jhana. “What we know is that the mind has the capacity to get deeply absorbed by certain experiences,” says Mago, the McGill neuroscientist. “What’s right or wrong in the end is defined by what helps people.”

Richard J. Davidson, founder and director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, notes that even modest amounts of meditation—under 10 hours of practice in beginners—can change brain plasticity. But he cautions against commercializing the jhanas prematurely. “People saying this benefits them is all well and good, but without real scientific evidence, we have no idea,” he says. “Anyone trying to monetize this should raise red flags.”

Neuroscientists are increasingly trying to understand how the jhanas might affect the brain. A January study out of Harvard and Mass General found that the jhanas are related to distinct patterns of neural activity across various parts of the brain that correspond with experiential aspects including attention, joy, and equanimity. Preliminary research by Mago and Michael Lifshitz, an assistant professor of psychiatry at McGill, showed that during deep jhana meditation, patterns of communication in the brain became more flexible and unpredictable and practitioners showed increased cognitive diversity and creativity afterward. These early findings align with theories that deep concentration can short-circuit the brain’s predictive mechanisms—leading to vivid, direct experience as mental chatter falls away. “Our perception of the world is much more malleable and adaptable than we think,” says Lifshitz, “and we can deliberately train our experience to function differently.”

‘We’re just helping people experience more joy when they meditate.’

—ALEX GRUVER,  
CO-FOUNDER  
OF JHOURNEY

**BY MY FINAL FULL DAY** on retreat, I’m noticing a subtle internal shift, as if the mental creases that had gathered inside me were smoothing out. Still, I haven’t experienced a jhana, and I find it hard to shake the idea that I’m letting down not just my instructors but also my future readers. Experts say that paradox seems to lie at the heart of jhana. “You need to want it, but also be OK with not getting it,” says philosopher and meditation researcher Terje Sparby. Over lunch, I share my dismay with instructor Grant Belsterling, who encourages me to reframe my experience—to think of happiness less as a state and more as an ongoing process. “You can have a goal without devaluing where you’re currently standing,” he tells me.

That afternoon, during a final 45-minute guided session with curriculum director Judah Newman, I lie on a sofa with my eyes shut and describe a warm yellow feeling of friendliness spreading through my body. Soon I run into a familiar obstacle: the lower left half of my body—still suffering nerve damage—is unable to fully experience that. For months, I’ve been in something of a holding pattern, with no way of knowing if I might regain the sensation I’d lost. Newman asks what the frustration is trying to tell me. “To accept that things won’t ever be the same again,” I reply. Another thought immediately follows: But they can still be good.

This realization unlocks something powerful. Suddenly, a luminous yellow substance washes over me, as if hope is saturating every cell of my body. My mind is filled with a montage of positive images of the future. I can’t stop smiling. After Newman leaves the room, the energy ebbs and flows, alternating between deep contentment and intense glee. At one point, I laugh uncontrollably for a minute or two. It feels like being on a drug.

When he returns, I tell him about my experience. He smiles: “That’s usually what I think of as the first jhana.”

Whether it’s real or “diluted” seems beside the point. For the rest of the afternoon, I experience a kind of surreal afterglow: flowers and leaves seem brighter, ordinary things are funnier, and I feel a newfound lightness toward people around me. For months, my body had felt alien and disconnected. Now I’m finally embracing it as a whole, capable of both pain and profound joy. For the first time in a long time, I feel compassion rather than frustration toward myself.

**JHOURNEY’S MOTTO**, “Come for the bliss, stay for the personal growth,” acknowledges that while confronting internal conflicts can be unpleasant, it’s often transformative. But as meditation has gone mainstream, the marketing has often glossed over its primary purpose: radically transforming





one's sense of self and reality. That reshaping of perception can be seriously destabilizing. "People didn't know what they were signing up for when they were just paying attention to their breath," says Ruben Laukkonen, a meditation researcher at Australia's Southern Cross University.

There's an increasing awareness of the potential risks of meditation, especially in high doses, as reports of depression, anxiety, and psychosis, though rare, have surfaced. "The journey to the cliff edge can be incredibly short," warns Daniel Ingram, a retired emergency-medicine physician and author of *Mastering the Core Teachings of the Buddha*.

One woman's Jhourney experience illustrates these concerns. The woman, who requested anonymity to protect her privacy, says she had informed the company of her history with depression but quickly began to feel highly agitated during an online retreat. "For about a month after, I lived in a state of very intense alarm," says the woman, who left early, in part because of a family matter. While she thinks the experience may have ultimately been beneficial, it felt

Participants at Jhourney retreats often meditate for six to eight hours a day

unpredictable. And though she praised the facilitators' compassionate response, she didn't seek further help from them, feeling that they were too young and inexperienced to guide her. More troublingly, fellow meditators discouraged her from speaking out, fearing she might "tank" a cool new company. "In this splash of enthusiasm, people who have a bad experience might be tempted not to talk about it," she says, "because they're afraid that they'll seem like buzzkills."

Jhourney declines to comment on specific individuals but acknowledges the risks, estimating that 1% of participants have experienced difficult emotions from some sort of internal conflict or trauma—but claiming they almost all later find the experience positive. Establishing the dangers of meditation is tricky: no one tracks base rates; meditation may attract those with pre-existing psychological challenges; some believe discussing negative experiences can become self-fulfilling prophecies; factors like participant selection criteria, dosage, and meditation technique all play a role. (Jhourney uses Imperial College London's exclusion criteria for psychedelic research to screen participants.)

Critics like meditation teacher Vince Horn have accused Jhourney of "arrogantly endangering people's mental health" in pursuit of capital gain. But Zerfas and Gruver believe their approach is safer than that of other retreats, highlighting innovative measures they've implemented in consultation with top experts. David Treleaven, author of *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness*, says Jhourney's plan sets a new industry standard, "the kind of thorough and thoughtful approach I've long hoped to see in the field of meditation."

Much of the backlash against Jhourney stems from a deeper skepticism among many Buddhists toward commercializing spiritual practices. They warn that fast-tracking the jhanas outside of the structure of ancient lineages risks overlooking crucial insights and that meditation stripped of its ethical core could be weaponized for ego-boosting or other destructive tendencies.

And yet millions could potentially benefit from deep meditative practices without subscribing to Buddhist norms. Secular teachings may also offer people more agency than traditional hierarchical models, experts say. Zerfas doesn't believe any religion can claim IP on the jhanas, calling them "discoveries, not inventions." He says it's almost a "moral imperative" to share them widely, and companies can scale access more effectively than nonprofits. And while Gruver knows Jhourney's current staff may be positioned to teach a certain audience, he remains optimistic that over time, many organizations could work together to discover how different demographics best learn these techniques.





“There are going to be hundreds of approaches to this problem. We just want that work to get done.”

**IN THE FINAL SEASON** of the TV show *The Good Place*, the characters arrive in the afterlife only to discover that even eternal bliss can lose its luster. With every desire met, the residents of the actual Good Place, or heaven, have become apathetic, their lives stripped of purpose. “Everyone is a happiness zombie!” one character exclaims.

The scene captures a key concern some Buddhists have about Jhourney’s approach. They fear it might create “jhana junkies” who get overly attached to pleasurable states, missing out on deeper spiritual insights that reduce self-interest and increase wisdom and compassion. Critics argue that without proper follow-up, practitioners might just sit around getting high on self-generated pleasure.

Yet to my surprise, it seems that for most people, finding the bliss button doesn’t make you want to press it all the time. Sasha Chapin, a writer who has been meditating for over a decade, describes the jhanas as “cool toys that you tend to put away after an initial period of obsession.” Pure pleasure, it turns out, isn’t really what humans want.

Modern meditation culture draws in a wide array of people, from the deeply suffering to the casually curious, from spiritual New Age seekers to productivity hackers. While it’s easy to dismiss

*Jhourney’s goal is to help tens of thousands of people reach jhana each year*

‘What’s right or wrong in the end is defined by what helps people.’

—JONAS MAGO,  
COGNITIVE  
NEUROSCIENTIST AT  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

the interest in the jhanas as another Silicon Valley fad, Devaney argues that even the much derided Bay Area “optimizer” mindset can be a starting point for real transformation. “If you’re going to try to do something to make yourself feel better than other people, it’s better to meditate than to buy a helicopter,” she says. “Eventually, the meditation is going to show you yourself in a way that buying all the helicopters is not.”

For all the debates, Jhourney does seem to be offering a taste of profound states to many who might otherwise never encounter them. Some participants, myself included, discover a new appreciation for meditation that may ultimately lead to deeper self-exploration. “Jhana is like pouring water onto the leaves of a plant,” Cammarata argues. “It also goes very deeply into the roots, whether you know it or not.”

My curiosity about Jhourney had been sparked by a desire for a quick fix. On my retreat, I realized how impossible that was. Two months and many hours of meditation later, my emotional range has widened. I feel love and joy more strongly, and while self-compassion may not come naturally, I’m less inclined to fight my body’s limitations—instead tapping back into that feeling of wholeness. In trying to make myself “better,” I stumbled upon an age-old lesson: true peace comes from accepting things just as they are. □





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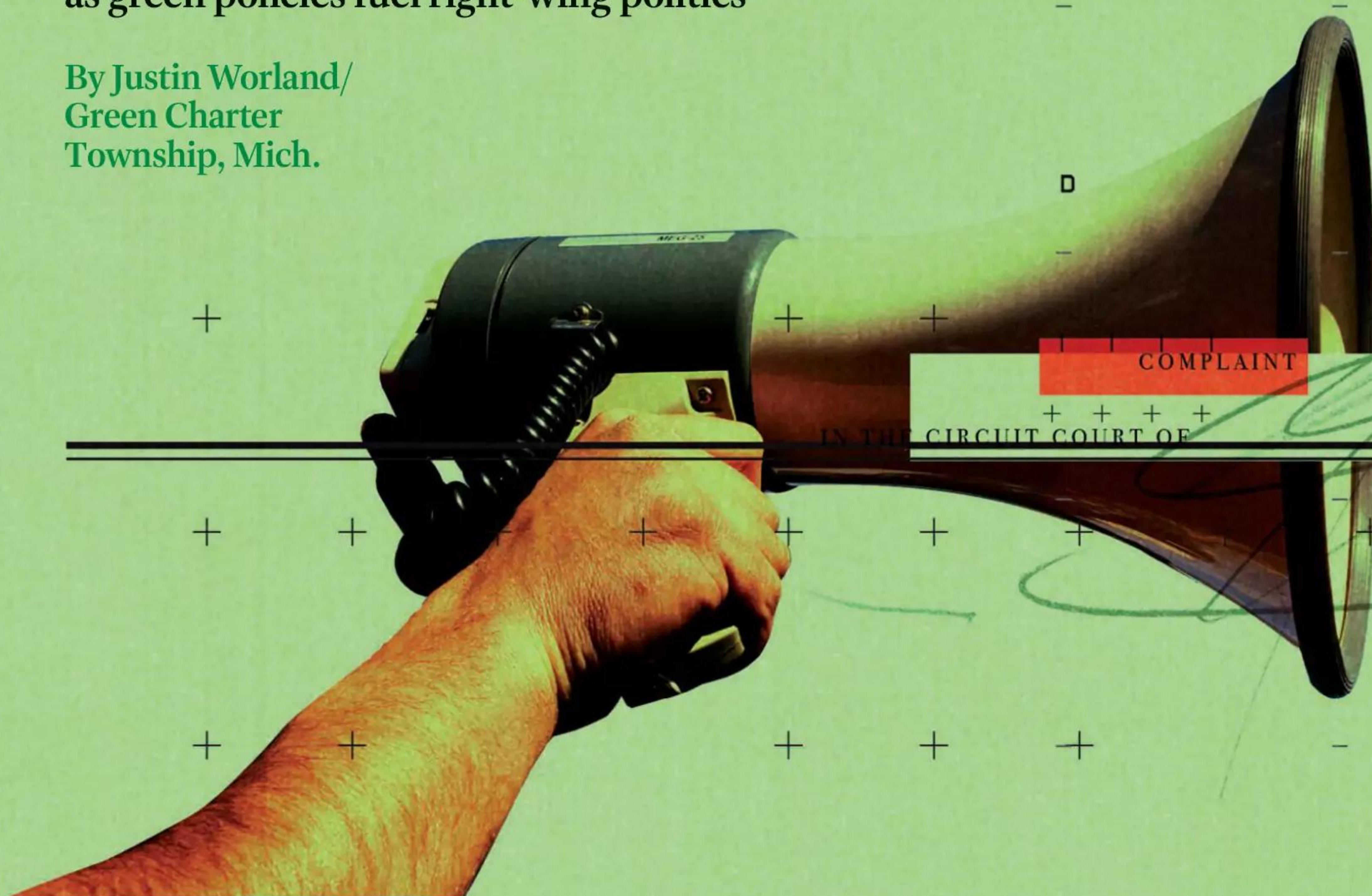
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# How to Avoid A Climate Backlash

The energy transition hangs in the balance, as green policies fuel right-wing politics

By Justin Worland/  
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Township, Mich.

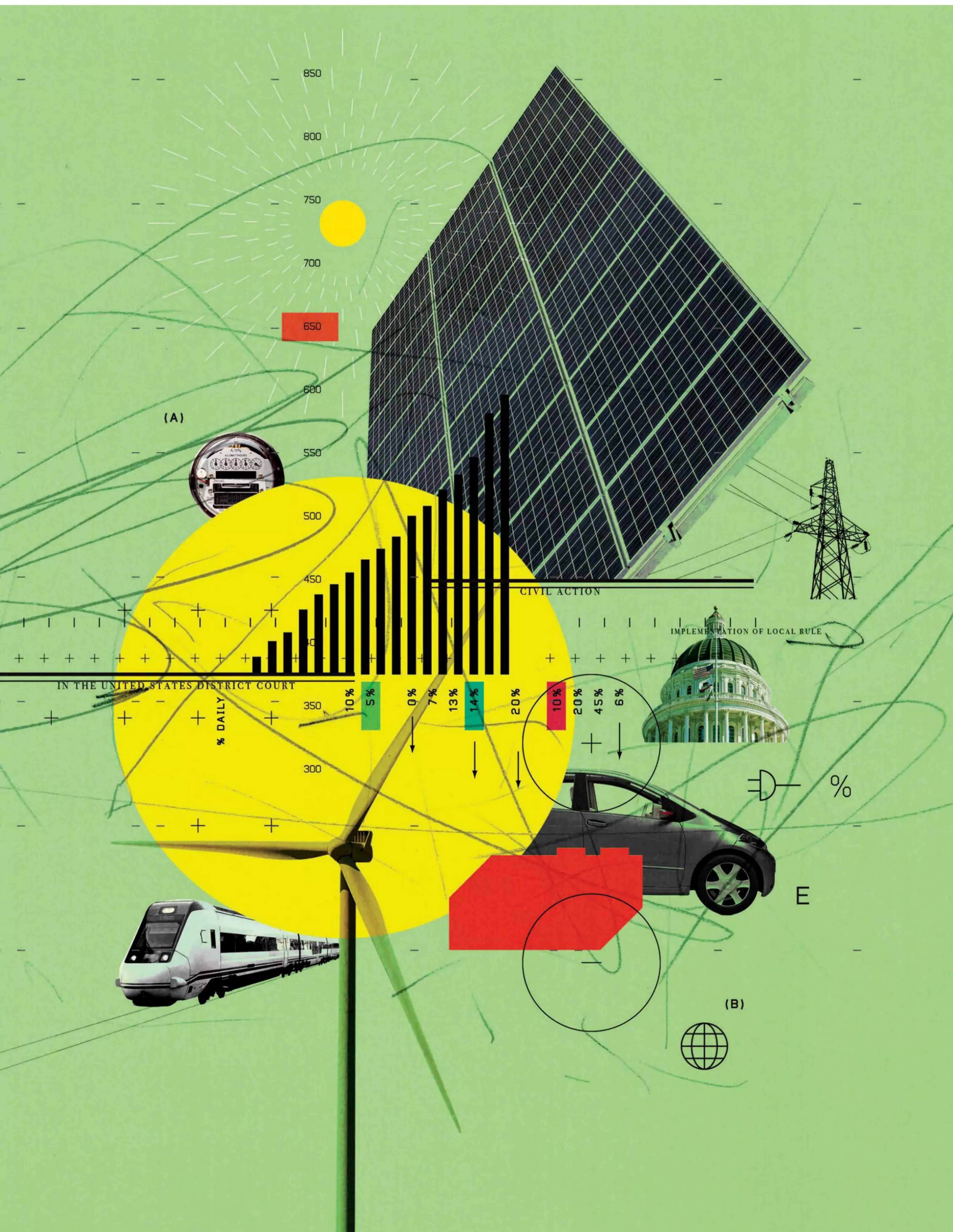


SIX MONTHS AFTER BEING OUSTED AS THE SUPERVISOR OF Green Charter Township in rural western Michigan, Jim Chapman is sitting at the dining table in his son's house, a haven from the dirty looks and death threats that continue even now. A self-described conservative Republican who was a police officer before entering local politics, Chapman says his downfall was negotiating to bring a \$2.4 billion electric-vehicle-battery plant owned by a Chinese company to town, what he calls a once-in-a-generation opportunity to grow the local economy.

The backlash was swift and withering. A Congressman launched an ad campaign ahead of his recall election, criticizing "local officials" for welcoming Gotion, the company building the plant. A recent caller left a voicemail threatening to target Chapman and "exercise my Second

ILLUSTRATION BY  
STUART BRADFORD  
FOR TIME







Amendment rights.” Another said he would call up his local militia. “This Neanderthal response has been the core of the problem,” says Chapman.

For a growing number of activists, he was just the start. Eight miles away, in a farm dotted with more than a dozen NO GOTION placards styled like Trump campaign signs, Lori Brock, the farm’s owner, is coordinating anti-Gotion activists. Teri and Ormand Hook, local Michiganders, are working to spread their message across the state and country, while other GOP groups have taken the fight statewide with radio ads and slick campaign mailers blasted in local races. The impact could extend from Green Charter Township all the way to the White House. “We win Michigan for Trump, then most likely Trump is President of the United States,” says Pete Hoekstra, the chair of the Michigan Republican Party, who is collaborating with local anti-Gotion campaigns. “A big reason for that would be what’s happening with China, and what’s happening with EVs.”

The fight for the future of the planet is embedded in this year’s U.S. presidential election in ways big and small, even as the phrase *climate change* is rarely used. Democrats are trumpeting the hundreds of billions of dollars now flowing to clean-tech projects; the party’s nominee is sure to echo President Joe Biden’s line that climate change is about jobs. Donald Trump and his supporters on the right have sought to turn clean energy into a stalking horse for Chinese dominance, a driver of rising energy costs, or a globalist ploy. Trump promises to cancel vehicle-emissions regulations, unlock more oil drilling, and once again take the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

A growing cohort of climate advocates view the simmering antclimate narrative with a concern bordering on panic. They have seen versions of the same fight playing out elsewhere, and it hasn’t gone well. In Europe, farmer protests and rising energy costs have put pressure on the European Union’s Green Deal. Climate advocates in Canada have watched with dismay as the nationwide carbon tax has been weaponized—and may play a significant role in coming elections. And in much of the Global South popular protests have created fears about following through on key reforms to fuel subsidies designed to address climate change.

The result, amid the hottest year on record, is a sort of climate retreat. French President Emmanuel Macron last year called for the E.U. to embrace a “regulatory pause” on new environmental rules. In March, the Biden Administration softened its rule that will require carmakers to produce more EVs. In June, New York Governor Kathy Hochul ditched a congestion-pricing plan designed to cut traffic and vehicle emissions by charging drivers in lower Manhattan. In the wake of record far-right wins in June’s E.U. parliamentary elections, the bloc’s leaders are dialing back climate priorities.

At the same time, Biden’s green subsidies have begun to pay political dividends. Many industries support his climate measures. Even in some deep-red regions, new jobs making clean technologies like solar panels and electric vehicles are winning the backing of climate-skeptical Republicans. Asked about solar-panel manufacturing in her district last year, right-wing firebrand Marjorie Taylor Greene told Politico’s E&E News, “I think they’re fantastic ... I support all kinds of energy.”

The coming months are crucial. If climate efforts become defined by right-wing narratives about China’s infiltrating U.S. schools, massive job losses, or rising energy costs, the transition away from fossil fuels could plateau just as it was getting started. “We are in a very fragile moment,” says Ali Zaidi, Biden’s national climate adviser. “The inflection point breaks in two very different directions.”

So climate advocates, researchers, and public officials are scrambling. Legislators are tweaking proposals to soften their impact on low-income people, and forward-thinking policymakers are devising creative ways to keep vulnerable communities from being left in the dust. Many other politicians



are backtracking, making a counterintuitive bet that by taking a few steps back on climate policy they will help protect climate efforts by keeping right-wing politicians out of office. But slowing down carries grave risks too. The longer we take to cut emissions, the worse warming will be. To get through this moment, leaders will need to thread a needle.

**ON A CLOUDY DAY** in the spring of 2023, the European Parliament in Brussels felt all but under siege. Across the city, farmers from around Europe had clogged the streets with their tractors in protest against environmental regulations then under discussion targeting agriculture. “To be honest, I don’t know where we will end,” Pascal Canfin, a French Member of the European Parliament whose party belongs to the centrist Renew Europe Group, told me in his office in Brussels as protests continued in the street. “This backlash is rather new.”

It’s only gotten worse. Since then, farmers have gathered to protest climate rules in cities across Europe—Madrid, Paris, and Rome, to name a few. In June, voters throughout the E.U. gave far-right parties record support in the bloc’s parliamentary elections. In France, the National Rally won the most votes; in Germany, the far-right AfD came in second after campaigning in part on opposition to climate policies. Meanwhile, the pan-European Green coalition sputtered, losing 18 seats. “In terms of being able to keep the green transition on course, I think this moment is pretty existential,” says Susi Dennison, a senior policy fellow





◀  
**JIM CHAPMAN  
WAS REMOVED  
AS HIS TOWN'S  
SUPERVISOR AFTER  
SUPPORTING AN  
EV-BATTERY PLANT**

at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Not long ago this situation would have been hard to imagine. In 2019, in the midst of Greta Thunberg's climate-change advocacy, which saw millions of young Europeans take to the streets, the bloc launched a Green Deal designed to eliminate the E.U.'s emissions by 2050. But then came a disruptive pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which raised energy costs. As these challenges persisted, many Europeans became unwilling to put up with new measures that cost them—even if the costs were relatively small. Autoworkers

## **'A TRANSITION TO HELL.'**

—FORMER PRESIDENT **DONALD TRUMP** ON THE SHIFT TO EVs

complained that the transition to EVs would disrupt jobs if it happened too fast. Farmers protested numerous rules that would require them to embrace new practices. And voters complained that it was the wrong time to tighten the bloc's program that charges industry for emissions, effectively raising energy costs. Only a third of E.U. citizens said they were satisfied by the bloc's response to climate change in a poll conducted earlier this year. Among Europeans who said they have trouble paying their bills most of the time, satisfaction with Europe's climate program was even lower, at 24%.

The biggest political winner appears to have

been the far right. For decades, nationalist forces had largely ignored climate change in favor of red-meat issues like migration. Now the European right wing has wrapped the costs of climate policy together with its long-standing critique of the E.U. to create a dark vision of a Europe where a global elite controls people's daily lives. And a July report from NATO warned that Russia has engaged in an online disinformation campaign around Europe's Green Deal designed to instigate climate backlash. "Climate has become part of identity politics here in Europe," says Dennison. "It's that sense of national populations losing control."

Voters aren't just punishing the E.U.; they're also targeting their own countries' governments. In the Netherlands, the backlash contributed to the toppling of the longtime Prime Minister Mark Rutte as a new "farmer-citizen" movement emerged in opposition to his agriculture rules and quickly became the largest party in the Dutch senate. In Spain, the government's water restrictions in response to persistent drought angered rural communities and helped fuel the rise of the right-wing Vox party. "We are concerned that there is a climate religion about which one can't disagree," said Vox leader Santiago Abascal in closely watched remarks explaining his climate position. The specter of right-wing populists has, in turn, already had consequences for climate policy. In a concession to protesters earlier this year, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz backed off cuts to subsidies for high-emitting agricultural vehicles and slowed the government's phaseout of fuel subsidies for farmers. And a leaked priorities list from the leaders of European countries meant to guide E.U. leadership in Brussels barely mentions climate policy.

Meanwhile, in Canada, ahead of coming elections, the Conservative Party has seized on energy costs stemming from the country's carbon tax. In Kenya, a plan to cut fuel subsidies has led to widespread protest. And then there's Australia. The country's long debate over carbon pricing that began more than a decade ago contributed to the downfall of two Prime Ministers and ushered in a right-wing leader who kept the country from doing anything substantial on the issue.

For all that, climate pushback is far from the only factor. In national elections in July, the French left defeated the country's far right, which had hoped to undo much of the country's climate agenda. In the U.K., former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak lost after trying to scale back his country's approach to global warming. Worldwide, voters still care about climate change. In the E.U.'s 2023 poll of citizens across the bloc, 93% of E.U. citizens said they believe climate change is a serious problem. "It's not that they deny the facts," says Teresa Ribera, a Vice President of the Spanish government and Minister of Ecological Transition.



“They lack confidence in institutions to shape the proper responses.”

**IF EUROPEAN POLITICIANS** are paying the price for climate policies that penalize emissions, advocates hope the story will play out differently in the U.S., thanks largely to the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The 2022 law opted for carrots rather than sticks and will spend hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to transform the country’s energy system. In Michigan, manufacturing firms have announced nearly \$12 billion in new clean-technology investments largely in electric-vehicle plants, according to nonprofit climate group E2. In the Southeast, EV makers and solar manufacturers are racing to set up shop in what has colloquially become known as “the battery belt.” Georgia, another swing state, has seen more than \$15 billion in clean-technology investment.

So far, Americans seem largely unmoved. A year after the IRA’s passage, nearly three-quarters of Americans had never heard of it, according to a *Washington Post* poll, and many tell other pollsters that Washington should prioritize the economy over climate change. Third Way, a center-left think tank that works on climate issues, found that support for congressional candidates declines when they say climate change needs to be addressed immediately compared with those who say “we cannot address climate change until inflation is under control.”

Extreme weather may make the most immediate case for addressing climate change, but it’s entirely possible that in 2024, projections of 2° of warming or more will matter less than the implications—real, perceived, or manufactured—of climate policy on pocketbook issues. In some congressional races, candidates have invoked Biden’s “Green New Deal”—a term he doesn’t use—to explain rising energy costs. Dark-money groups have purchased ads linking opposition to climate action with conservative causes. And Trump has homed in on electric vehicles, calling the shift to EVs a “transition to hell.” His official videos laying out his policy positions harp on the green transition, saying it has damaged American workers, led to an abandoning of U.S. natural resources, and ceded U.S. geopolitical might to China. At the Republican National Convention, railing on climate policy featured as an applause line. “They’ve spent trillions of dollars of things having to do with the Green New Scam,” Trump told the audience. “That has caused tremendous inflationary pressures.”

The November election will determine much about the endurance of the U.S. approach. If Trump wins, he would likely pull the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement and undo climate rules on everything from power plants to transportation. Plans laid out by Project 2025, a conservative



▲ **FARMERS IN SPAIN PROTEST EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL RULES, BLOCKING ROAD ACCESS**

► **A SIGN, WHICH TRANSLATES TO “OUR END, YOUR HUNGER,” CARRIED BY FARMERS IN CATALONIA**

group backed by former Trump staffers that has prepared a raft of policy proposals for a Trump presidency, would kneecap the agencies that regulate climate. And Trump would likely target the IRA, potentially pursuing a repeal if Republicans control both houses of Congress. Even if he couldn’t kill it, he might succeed at chipping away at it. Taken together, these moves would leave the U.S. far short of its international climate commitments when countries are meant to do more.

There is some evidence that undoing the IRA would face bipartisan resistance. Elected officials in the Southeast U.S., including many Trump-aligned Republicans, have come to embrace clean technologies as manufacturing has moved into their communities. It’s not unusual to see a Republican law-

**‘WE ARE IN A VERY FRAGILE MOMENT.’**

—ALI ZAIDI, WHITE HOUSE CLIMATE ADVISER

maker at a groundbreaking for a solar-panel factory or an EV plant. Democrats hope—with good reason—that continued investment will broaden support for climate measures.

So the battle to make climate policy palatable could make all the difference, not just in the outcome of the election but also in hardening American sentiment about the green transition. That fight for the future is now under way in full force in Michigan, a hub of the transition because of its long-standing auto industry. The state is benefiting from a wave of big clean-technology investments





that promises to keep unemployment low, giving Democrats key talking points.

But in rural Michigan, where two EV-battery plants are planned each at a cost of billions of dollars, the conversation sounds completely different. Residents have been inundated with mail campaigns and ads from right-wing activists and organizers decrying the plants. Representative John Moolenaar, a Republican who represents western Michigan in Congress, spent more than \$60,000 in federal dollars on a campaign that included an ad claiming that the battery maker “does the bidding of the Chinese Communist Party.” And a number of groups with limited paper trails have popped up to accentuate the issue: Standup Michigan, the Michigan-China Economic and Security Review Group, the Committee to Clean Up Mecosta County, and the EV Taxpayer Task Force.

Michigan is an early example of the small battles that will collectively determine whether the energy transition endures—not only in the U.S. but anywhere. In her 2020 book *Short Circuiting Policy*, political scientist Leah Stokes writes about an early wave of clean-energy laws in predominantly red states—including Texas and Arizona—triggering a backlash from local industry that deepened climate-change denial and made further climate policy increasingly difficult there.

This time, at least, some climate advocates see the challenge coming, and are scrambling to meet it.

**THREE HOURS’ DRIVE** from Green Charter Township, on the other side of Michigan, a group of executives from auto-parts manufacturers gathered in the conference room of a Detroit skyscraper

overlooking a bustling downtown, now on the upswing after two decades of downturn driven by automation and outsourcing. Sitting at the head of the table, Jonathan Smith, who left a policy job in D.C. to help his native Michigan through the energy transition, jumped into his plan to ensure that the upswing continues.

The state-funded office he is shepherding, known as the Community & Worker Economic Transition Office, will send “SWAT” teams to communities with pending plant closures, helping them find funding and job-retraining programs. It will identify at-risk suppliers in the automotive industry and bring them opportunities to diversify their business. And it will provide technical assistance to local governments trying to navigate the transition. “The shift from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy, the Great Recession and the restructuring of the auto industry, those were things that we did not have a ton of opportunity to anticipate,” he told the executives. “This time is very different; this could be a really powerful way for us to get out ahead of some of the economic change that’s coming.”

Understanding past transitions offers important insight into the challenges of this one. Joseph Majkut, who heads the energy and climate change program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says he worries the future of climate policy could mirror how trade policy has evolved over the past three decades. Once a matter of near universal orthodoxy, free trade has become a bogeyman across political parties. At a country level, we know that trade increases economic prosperity. But most people live rooted in communities, and free-trade policy has undoubtedly left many communities behind even as politicians have promised support that never came. Climate policy that helps the world avoid the worst effects of warming is also a net good for everyone. But that may not be enough to win over communities that suffer in the transition.

And the echoes abound. For the past 15 years, officials have assumed the economic upside of addressing climate change would seal the deal. But climate advocates are increasingly coming to grips with the reality that climate policy can also bring economic challenges and dislocation, and they need to address that.

Michigan’s economic-transition office is one example, and its work



reflects research on the on-the-ground challenges policymakers need to address. Drawing on lessons from climate policy across the globe, World Bank researchers last year identified several factors that determine successful societal buy-in for climate policy. Officials should weave climate measures into a broader growth and development agenda, researchers say. Economic side effects need to be managed. And all of this needs to be well communicated. The World Bank cites everything from the rollout of a climate-friendly waste-management system in Mexico to facilitating industrial efficiency in Japan as case studies of climate policies that thread the needle.

**NOW, THE THINKING** needs to scale, and the communications challenge is a good place to start. In the U.S., whole ecosystems have built up around the idea that Americans will vote for new jobs. But many Americans will rightly ask whether those promised new jobs come at the expense of existing ones. In Europe, a consensus has grown that explaining climate policy solely for the purpose of reducing emissions is no longer sufficient. “We in the climate movement have to be quite clever,” says Laurence Tubiana, the head of the European Climate Foundation. “We have to be very conscious of where people are.”

And, above all, the economics needs to actually help people on the ground. Some of those efforts will be led out of capitals. In Canada, the

▲  
**PROTESTERS IN  
BIG RAPIDS, MICH.,  
RALLY AGAINST THE  
GOTION BATTERY  
PLANT TO BE  
BUILT NEARBY**



communities whose economies might suffer in the transition and the law provides incentives for job-training programs, to name a few.

But to make it work requires local efforts too. To the communities, companies, and individuals that need many of these programs, accessing them can feel daunting. Smith notes that the U.S. has no shortage of job-training programs. It lacks the people in the real world connecting the dots.

He and his team have their work cut out for them. To many, the promise of jobs doesn't make up for the prospect of an energy transition that would transform the fabric of the local community, even if for better. At a rally in the town of Marshall, Mich., where Ford is building a more than \$2 billion EV-battery plant, I met Barry Wayne Adams, who held a sign reading BLAH BLAH BLAH JOBS. The jobs message carries little weight for people fearful of the coming change, he told me. He says he is concerned about the influence of China in the community and the local environmental effects of a new manufacturing plant. “Whenever they come out with any kind of public messaging, it's ‘We're so excited about the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring jobs,’” says Adams. “They never address any of the issues that matter to us.”

The biggest challenge in avoiding a climate backlash in the U.S., though, may be getting climate advocates to admit that something isn't working. Not everyone is eager to do so. When I floated early inklings of this story to some, I received a mixed response. Some echoed my concerns, arguing that we're slow-walking into a disaster. Others discouraged me, arguing that bringing attention to climate backlash risks fanning the flames. But there's another way to think about it: pointing out the flame gives us a chance to stamp it out before it's too late. —With reporting by JULIA ZORTHIAN/NEW YORK

**‘WE IN THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT  
HAVE TO BE QUITE CLEVER.’**

—LAURENCE TUBIANA, EUROPEAN CLIMATE FOUNDATION  
PRESIDENT, ON COMMUNICATING CLIMATE CHANGE

government has begun to revamp a program that helps homeowners renovate in a climate-friendly way to focus more closely on low-income Canadians; a rebate for low- and middle-income families has been rebranded to emphasize that the money is coming from the carbon tax. “If you are asking people to sacrifice and sacrifice, that's probably not the way to actually get the majority of people to support the work that you're doing,” says Jonathan Wilkinson, the country's Energy and Natural Resources Minister. In Europe, the E.U. has created a social climate fund with a €65 billion budget to dole out money to places left vulnerable by the transition. The Inflation Reduction Act, too, contains a dizzying number of programs and incentives to help vulnerable communities. Project developers get better tax breaks for building in

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# Kid *of the* Year

ONE EXCEPTIONAL YOUNG  
PERSON—AND FIVE HONOREES—  
GIVING US HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

## Heman Bekele

DREAMING OF A CURE

*By Jeffrey Kluger*

.....

HEMAN BEKELE WHIPPED UP THE MOST DANGEROUS of what he called his “potions” when he was just over 7 years old. He’d been conducting his own science experiments for about three years by that point, mixing up whatever he could get his hands on at home and waiting to see if the resulting goo would turn into anything.

“They were just dish soap, laundry detergent, and common household chemicals,” he says today of the ingredients he’d use. “I would hide them under my bed and see what would happen if I left them overnight. There was a lot of mixing together completely at random.”

But soon, things got less random. For Christmas before his 7th birthday, Heman was given a chemistry set that came with a sample of sodium

PHOTOGRAPH BY DINA LITOVSKY FOR TIME



hydroxide. By then, he had been looking up chemical reactions online and learned that aluminum and sodium hydroxide can together produce prodigious amounts of heat. That got him thinking that perhaps he could do the world some good. “I thought that this could be a solution to energy, to making an unlimited supply,” he says. “But I almost started a fire.”

After that, his parents kept a closer eye on him. As it turned out, having adults watching what he does is something that Heman, now 15, would have to get used to. These days, a whole lot of people are paying him a whole lot of attention. Last October, the 3M company and Discovery Education selected Heman, a rising 10th-grader at Woodson High School in Fairfax County, Virginia, as the winner of its Young Scientist Challenge. His prize: \$25,000. His accomplishment: inventing a soap that could one day treat and even prevent multiple forms of skin cancer. It may take years before such a product comes to market, but this summer Heman is already spending part of every weekday working in a lab at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, hoping to bring his dream to fruition. When school is in session, he’ll be there less often, but will continue to plug away. “I’m really passionate about skin-cancer research,” he says, “whether it’s my own research or what’s happening in the field. It’s absolutely incredible to think that one day my bar of soap will be able to make a direct impact on somebody else’s life. That’s the reason I started this all in the first place.”

It’s that ambition—to say nothing of that selflessness—that has earned Heman recognition as TIME’s Kid of the Year for 2024.

**BORN IN ADDIS ABABA** before emigrating to the U.S. with his family when he was 4, Heman recalls that some of his earliest memories were of seeing laborers working in the blistering sun, usually with no protection for their skin. His parents taught him and his sisters—Hasset, now 16, and Liya, now 7—to cover up, and explained the dangers of too much time outdoors without sunscreen or proper clothing.

“When I was younger, I didn’t think much of it, but when I came to America, I realized what a big problem the sun and ultraviolet radiation is when you’re exposed to it for a long time,” Heman says.

It didn’t take too long for him to start thinking about how he might help. A few years ago, he read about imiquimod, a drug that, among other uses, is approved to fight one form of skin cancer and has shown promise against several more. Typically, imiquimod, which can help destroy tumors and usually comes in the form of a cream, is prescribed as a front-line drug as part of a broader cancer treatment plan, but Heman wondered if it could be made available more easily to people in the earliest stages of the disease. A bar of soap, he reckoned, might be just the delivery system for

such a lifesaving drug, not just because it was simple, but because it would be a lot more affordable than the \$40,000 it typically costs for skin-cancer treatment.

“What is one thing that is an internationally impactful idea, something that everyone can use, [regardless of] socioeconomic class?” Heman recalls thinking. “Almost everyone uses soap and water for cleaning. So soap would probably be the best option.”

There was a long way to go between inspiration and application, however. Executing on his idea was more complicated than simply mixing the drug into an ordinary bar of soap, since any therapeutic power the imiquimod might confer would just be washed down the drain with the suds. The answer was to combine the soap with a lipid-based nanoparticle that would linger on the skin when the soap was washed away—much the way moisturizer or fragrance can stay behind after the suds are rinsed off.

There was only so much brainstorming Heman could do on his own, however. Then, in 2023, he came across the 3M challenge and submitted a video explaining his idea. Soon, he received an invite to the company’s HQ in St. Paul, Minn., to deliver a pitch in front of a panel of judges. Before that day was out, he’d been named the winner. The \$25,000

prize, he knew, would go a long way toward helping him afford to pursue his research, but he’d still need a professional lab in which to conduct the work. That opportunity arrived in February, when he attended a networking event hosted by the Melanoma Research Alliance, in Washington, D.C. There, he met Vito Rebecca, a molecular biologist and assistant professor at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

“I remember reading somewhere something about this young kid who had an idea for a skin-cancer soap,” says Rebecca. “It immediately

piqued my interest, because I thought, how cool, him wanting to make it accessible to the whole world. And then, by complete serendipity at this Melanoma Research Alliance meeting, the CEO of the alliance introduced me to Heman. From the first conversation, his passion was evident. When I found out he lived very nearby in Virginia, I told him if he ever wanted to stop by the lab he’d be more than welcome.”

Heman took him up on that idea, and Rebecca agreed to sponsor Heman, acting as his principal investigator and inviting him to work at the Baltimore lab, toggling between benchwork and schoolwork back in Fairfax.

For close to half a year now, Heman and Rebecca have been running basic research on mice, injecting the animals with strains of skin cancer and preparing to apply the lipid-bound, imiquimod-infused soap and see what the results are. And though they’re getting ready to test it and a control against melanoma, Heman knows “there’s still a long way to go”—not just testing the soap, but also patenting it and getting FDA certification, which can take a decade altogether.

It is a measure of Heman’s enormous head start that when

.....  
**‘I just came up with an idea. I worked towards that idea, and I was able to bring it to life.’**  
 —HEMAN BEKELE  
 .....



that decade passes, he will still be only 25 years old—the age at which medical students have not even completed their postgrad education. He’s making good use of that time. In addition to working on his idea, he’s promoting it. In June, he delivered a presentation before 8,000 people at Boston’s Tsongas Center, during a meeting of the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists. “That was nerve-racking,” he says, “but it was fun.”

Heman has fun in more conventional ways too. He’s part of the Woodson High School marching band, on both flute and trombone. He plays basketball, reads voraciously (especially fantasy, though he recently reread *The Great Gatsby*, which he describes as “a pretty good read”), and considers chess “a turn-my-brain-off-and-play kind of thing.”

He credits his family, particularly his parents, for setting the stage for his achievements. His mother Muluemebet is a teacher; his father Wondwossen is a human-resources specialist for the U.S. Agency for International Development. The example of their sacrifice, coming to an unfamiliar country in service of their children’s education, has imbued him with a love of learning and a commitment to pursuing the improbable—or even the seemingly impossible. Nor are his parents and Rebecca the only adults stewarding him on his long scientific journey. He is also aided by Deborah Isabelle, his mentor from 3M.

“I got really lucky,” says Isabelle. “Last year was my first year participating as a mentor in the Young Scientist Challenge, and I was paired with Heman. He’s an incredible, passionate, very inspiring young man.”

That doesn’t mean he doesn’t make mistakes—and Isabelle, for one, has been there to catch him when he falls.

“At one point when he was making the soap, things didn’t work the way he expected,” she says. “So I asked him, What didn’t work? What did you do? And we talked about it, and he’s like, ‘Wow, I didn’t exactly follow the directions.’ And so we had a conversation about that, and he was able to go up and figure out some things, and say, ‘OK, this is what I learned from that.’”

That kind of trial and error will, Heman hopes, take him to the day that his health-giving soap can at last be used in early-stage cancers—including so-called cancer Stage 0, when there is just a small growth that has not yet had much effect on the surface of the skin—and then in later stages, when it would be an adjunct to other treatments.

For all of this, Heman remains humble about what he’s accomplished in just 15 years. “Anybody could do what I did,” he says. “I just came up with an idea. I worked towards that idea, and I was able to bring it to life.” But he confesses that he worries too: scientific breakthroughs seem to be coming faster and faster—in medicine, in engineering, in artificial intelligence—and he frets that people may have reached something of a saturation point.

“A lot of people have this mindset that everything’s been done, there’s nothing left for me to do,” he says. “To anybody having that thought, [I’d say] we’ll never run out of ideas in this world. Just keep inventing. Keep thinking of new ways to improve our world and keep making it a better place.”

—With reporting by JULIA ZORTHIAN



## Dom Pecora

FIXING BIKES, CHANGING LIVES

By Jaime Joyce

**By the time Dominick Pecora was 10 years old, he’d broken and repaired his bicycle many times. He thought it made sense to upgrade to something sturdier, so he went to his mom with a big ask: “I wanted a really nice, expensive mountain bike,” Dom, now 15, says.**

**His mom said no. But she did offer to help him raise the funds to buy the bike himself. Dom figured he could earn money by fixing bikes, a skill he’d honed by watching YouTube videos. His mom set up a Facebook page—Dom Fixes Bikes—to spread the word about his services. “We had a kind of pay-what-you-want theme,” Dom recalls.**

DOM PECORA AT HIS SHOP IN MALVERN, PA., WHICH HE OPENED IN SEPTEMBER



Eventually, he was able to purchase his dream bike. He also had enough money left over to surprise six other kids with brand-new bikes for Christmas. That was in 2020, during the pandemic. After that, “I just continued to do it,” Dom says.

At first, he worked out of his home. When more room was needed, he rented a one-car garage. “There was no electricity, no AC, no heat,” Dom says. Plus, there was no bathroom.

Despite the challenges, Dom persisted. Last September, he celebrated the grand opening of his first storefront, in Malvern, Pa., where he does tune-ups and repairs and sells new and refurbished bikes.

During the holiday season he gave away 121 bikes, surpassing his goal of 100 a year. Sponsorships and donations to his nonprofit help support his mission. Recipients of donated bikes have included young people in recovery from addiction and individuals experiencing homelessness.

“Since the beginning, I always wanted everyone to be able to ride a bike, no matter their financial abilities,” Dom says. The process, he adds, is simple: “Everyone who applies for a bike will get a bike.”

That’s how 5-year-old Ilarii, a newcomer from Ukraine, got a bike. Shortly after a request was made by his school, Ilarii was the proud new owner of a snazzy black-and-red BMX bike with training wheels. “It was just such a nice thing for [Dom] to do,” recalls Matt Coyne, a deacon at the Downingtown, Pa., parish that is sponsoring the boy and his mom.

Sarah Greim has also been touched by Dom’s generosity. She’s executive director of the Timothy School in Berwyn, Pa., which

serves students with autism. “Riding a bike can be challenging for a lot of our kids,” Greim says. Last fall, Dom reached out to the school with an offer to donate bikes built for riders with special needs. “It’s such a joy to peek out onto the playground and see students riding these bikes and just having fun,” Greim says. “That’s all thanks to Dom. He brought this great experience into the lives of our students.”

Pennsylvania state representative Melissa Shusterman, who represents Dom’s district, has also seen the teen in action. “[He] is an excellent example of how ambitious and plugged in young people are to the social issues of our time,” Shusterman said in an email. “His generosity and accomplishments are impressive and give me a lot of hope for the future.”

For Dom, the passion project remains pure—and personal. “I love bikes,” Dom says. “For me, my bike represents a lot of freedom.” Riding, he adds, is “a way to kind of clear my head, and it’s like that for a lot of other people as well.”

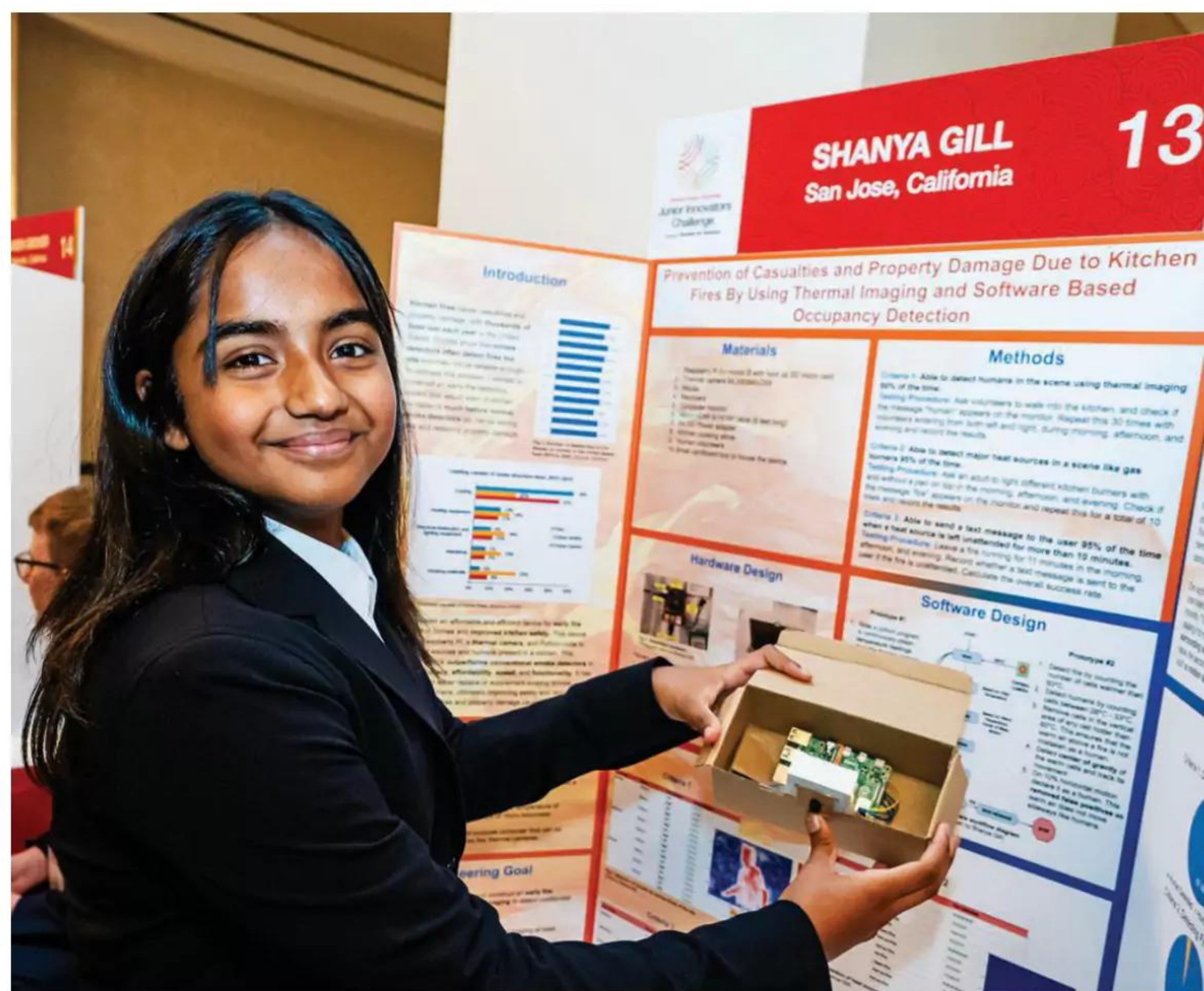
‘Since the beginning, I always wanted everyone to be able to ride a bike, no matter their financial abilities.’

—DOM PECORA

# Shanya Gill

FIGHTING FIRE WITH INGENUITY

By Sanya Mansoor



SHANYA GILL COULDN’T STOP THINKING about the restaurant behind her house in San Jose, Calif., that burned down in 2022. Neither could her family. Her mom became paranoid and always double-checked to make sure their stove was turned off.

Shanya, now 13, learned that unattended cooking is the leading factor in home fires—accounting for one-third of incidents. She felt that smoke detectors weren’t always effective in providing an urgent warning, so she set out to create a device that alerts users to fires before they even start. “What I realized is that ... I could learn how to code and I could really make a change,” she says.

Shanya’s invention uses a thermal camera and a small computer to detect unattended heat sources; if it’s been two minutes and there’s no sign of humans, it sends a text to the user to warn of a potential fire. That idea helped her win the Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge, a prestigious science competition for middle schoolers in the U.S. Her invention and leadership skills during a week in D.C. helped her beat 2,000 other applicants for a \$25,000 prize. (About 65,000 middle schoolers compete in affiliated science fairs—and of those, the top 10% are eligible to apply for the competition.) “That was kind of an aha! moment for me ... Oh, I can actually do this,” she says. The annual competition is organized by Society for Science,

SHANYA GILL PROUDLY PRESENTS A PROTOTYPE AND PLANS FOR HER EARLY FIRE-DETECTION DEVICE



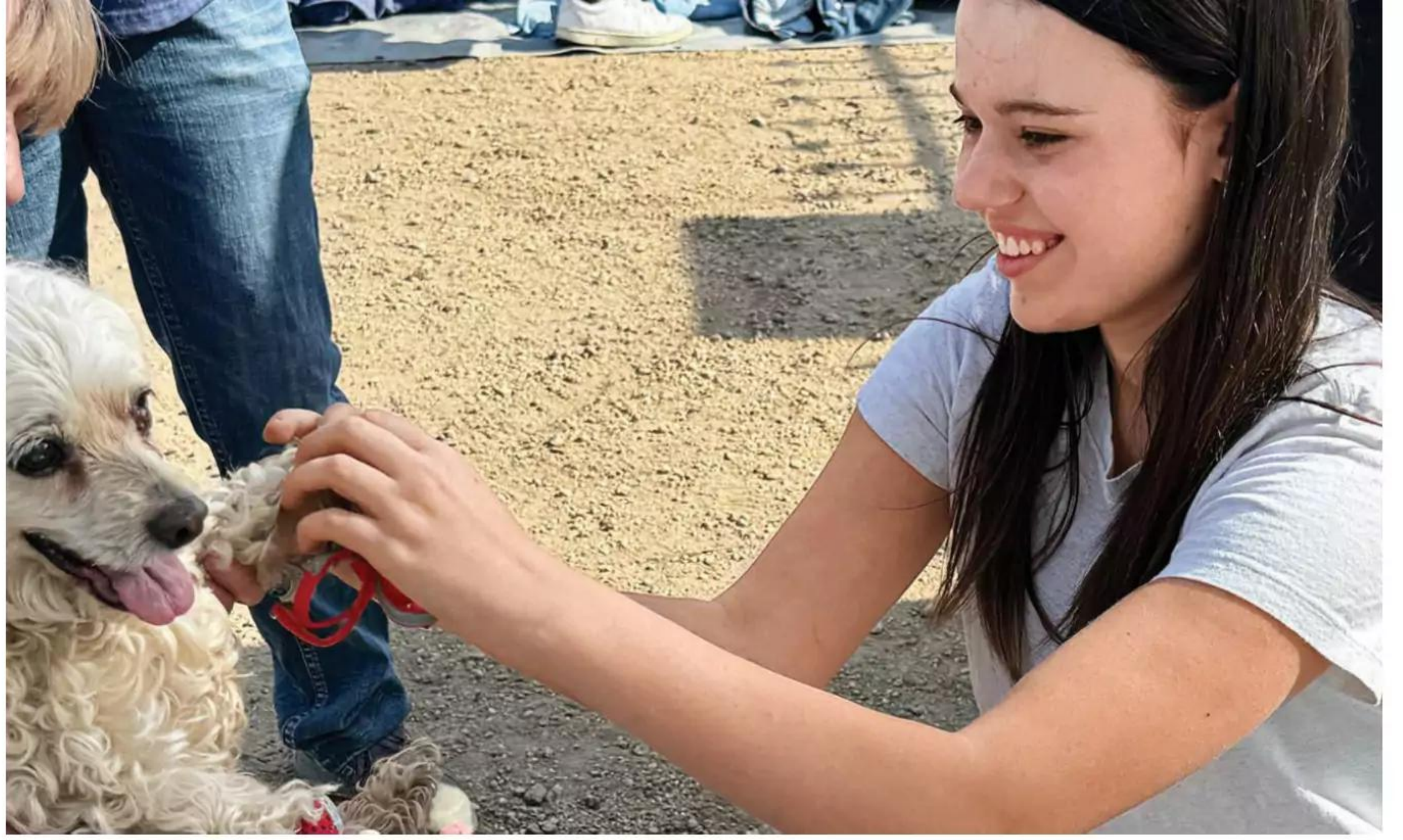
a nonprofit focused on promoting equity in STEM, hosting science competitions, and publishing a magazine.

Maya Ajmera, president of the Society for Science, says Shanya's project stood out because it tapped into an innovative way of using engineering to solve a real-life problem. According to the National Fire Protection Association, one-quarter of the roughly 1.5 million fires in 2022 occurred in homes and caused more than 2,700 deaths—that's almost three-quarters of the total civilian death toll from fires that year. Ajmera is also impressed by how Shanya kept working. "She didn't just stop with the project ... she's made connections with the community that's most impacted by it ... the firemen and women putting out fires," Ajmera says.

Shanya met Lori Moore-Merrell, who leads the U.S. Fire Administration, at its headquarters in March. "I thought it would be a quick in-and-out thing," Shanya says. But she was wrong. "She knew what my product was," she adds. The federal agency is helping Shanya try to fund the app and launch it at a greater scale. Currently, the only test trial is in her house. But "the product is pretty much almost done," Shanya says.

One improvement occurred to her while at the competition in D.C. She realized that AI is a lot faster than Python, so she's changing up the programming. Shanya has put her code up on GitHub, which is open-source, so people can make suggestions on how to improve the program, which still has some bugs. She didn't want to patent the technology. "If I was the sole creator, it'd be hard to get it everywhere," she says. "But I just want other people to be safe—and I want people to feel safe in their own homes."

Shanya says she used to struggle with insecurities tied to her body image, and was called names because of her size. But in recent years, she has developed a healthier self-image, and working on the project has helped her build confidence. "Innovation can have a lot of impact—not only on the people you're helping, but also on yourself," she says.



## Jordan Sucato

PROTECTING PAWS

By Allison Singer

Jordan Sucato, 15, lives in Phoenix, Arizona, an area the National Weather Service says is on track to have its hottest-ever summer. As the temperature in the air rises, so too does the temperature of the pavement, endangering the delicate paw pads of dogs walking on it. Though all dogs are at risk, Jordan's mission is to protect the most vulnerable—homeless dogs, or the pets of people who are unhoused. These pets often tread multiple miles a day outside. "Their paws can burn and blister in under five minutes," Jordan says. "If it's 120 degrees temperature-wise, it's 140 degrees on the concrete."

Through Laws for Paws LLC, the nonprofit Jordan founded in January, the teen has raised more than \$7,000 for her mission, enough to provide protective boots for 515 dogs. Jordan's funds support a partner organization, Dogs Day Out AZ, which distributes proper protective shoes, among other needed resources.

Jordan has helped hand out the boots, and has learned how to measure a dog's foot for the right size. She "cares so much about the homeless dogs in the community," says Dogs Day Out AZ founder Monique Hebert. "She is an absolutely phenomenal young girl, and we could not be more proud to have her on our team."

Jordan's goal of raising \$20,000 for protective boots comes at a critical time. Arizona's Maricopa County has seen "an explosion of homelessness over the last several years," says Phillip Scharf, CEO and COO of Central Arizona Shelter Services. Not all shelters are able to

welcome all kinds of pets; some can accept only documented emotional support or service animals.

"People are making really profound decisions around care," he says, "and they're choosing to remain unsheltered because they want to make sure they can support their animal."

Even now, in what Scharf calls "the crunch of the summertime heat," pet owners who are unhoused may prioritize their pet's needs above their own. A dog may be "their best friend, their partner, their roommate, their navigational guide," says Scharf. "For some of our clients, their entire world is that animal."

Jordan's journey as an animal advocate started early. She says she "grew up volunteering" alongside her mom. When she was 8, the two helped out with the Luv of Dogz Fund, an Arizona-based nonprofit that advocates and provides resources for homeless, abused, and rescued dogs. Jordan says she developed her "absolute appreciation for animals" through her work with the organization.

That appreciation extends to her own beloved pets—currently, two dogs, Sam and Tucker, and a cat, Bagheera. "I've had all types of pets," she adds. "Growing up, I had lizards and birds and hamsters and just about everything you can think of."

Jordan also speaks up for legislative change. Last year, she advocated for a statewide bill that would ban the sale of cosmetics tested on animals. That bill is expected to be reintroduced at the next legislative session by state senator John Kavanagh, who has met with Jordan to discuss the issue.

Many kids care about animals and their welfare. What sets Jordan apart? "Her passion and her spirit," says Hebert. "Her knowledge. Her ambition. I wish all 15-year-olds in the world right now could be like Jordan."

**JORDAN SUCATO  
PUTS BOOTS  
ON A DOG TO  
PROTECT ITS  
PAW PADS**





# Keivonn Woodard

ACTING FOR REPRESENTATION

By Megan McCluskey

WHEN KEIVONN WOODARD FIRST APPEARS AS SAM BURRELL IN the fourth episode of HBO's postapocalyptic epic *The Last of Us*, he's holding a gun and gesturing for quiet by lifting a single finger to his lips. During the original 2023 run of the series' first season, that seconds-long scene was enough for fans to spend the next week buzzing in anticipation of seeing more of Sam, an 8-year-old survivor of the show's zombie fungus pandemic who, like Keivonn himself, is Deaf.

"I received so many positive comments," Keivonn, now 11, tells TIME through an American Sign Language interpreter. "People were really looking forward to my second episode."

Titled "Endure and Survive," the following installment saw Sam and his older brother Henry (Lamar Johnson) team up with main characters Joel (Pedro Pascal) and Ellie (Bella Ramsey) to try to escape a hostile quarantine zone. The episode became the highest rated of the season on IMDb and cemented Keivonn as one of the show's biggest breakout stars. "Everyone was telling me how touched they were by my performance," he says. "They couldn't believe I was actually Deaf."

While Keivonn had only one professional acting credit to his name before *The Last of Us*, the widespread acclaim generated by

his portrayal of Sam didn't come as a surprise to series co-creator Craig Mazin. "When [one of my shows] is airing, there are times when I'm sitting there wondering, 'How is this going to go?' I'm nervous," he says. "And then there are times where I'm like, 'I have something great that nobody knows about.' That was a Sunday night where I just sat back and went, 'Wait till people see this kid. They're going to lose their minds.'"

Making Sam Deaf in the TV version of *The Last of Us* was a departure from the show's video-game source material, one Mazin says was born of a desire to see more disability representation on-screen. "There are still areas of representation where Hollywood has just failed completely," he says. "Disability is one where we've really struggled."

But it wasn't exactly easy to find a Black child actor, 8 to 12 years old, who was Deaf and fluent in either

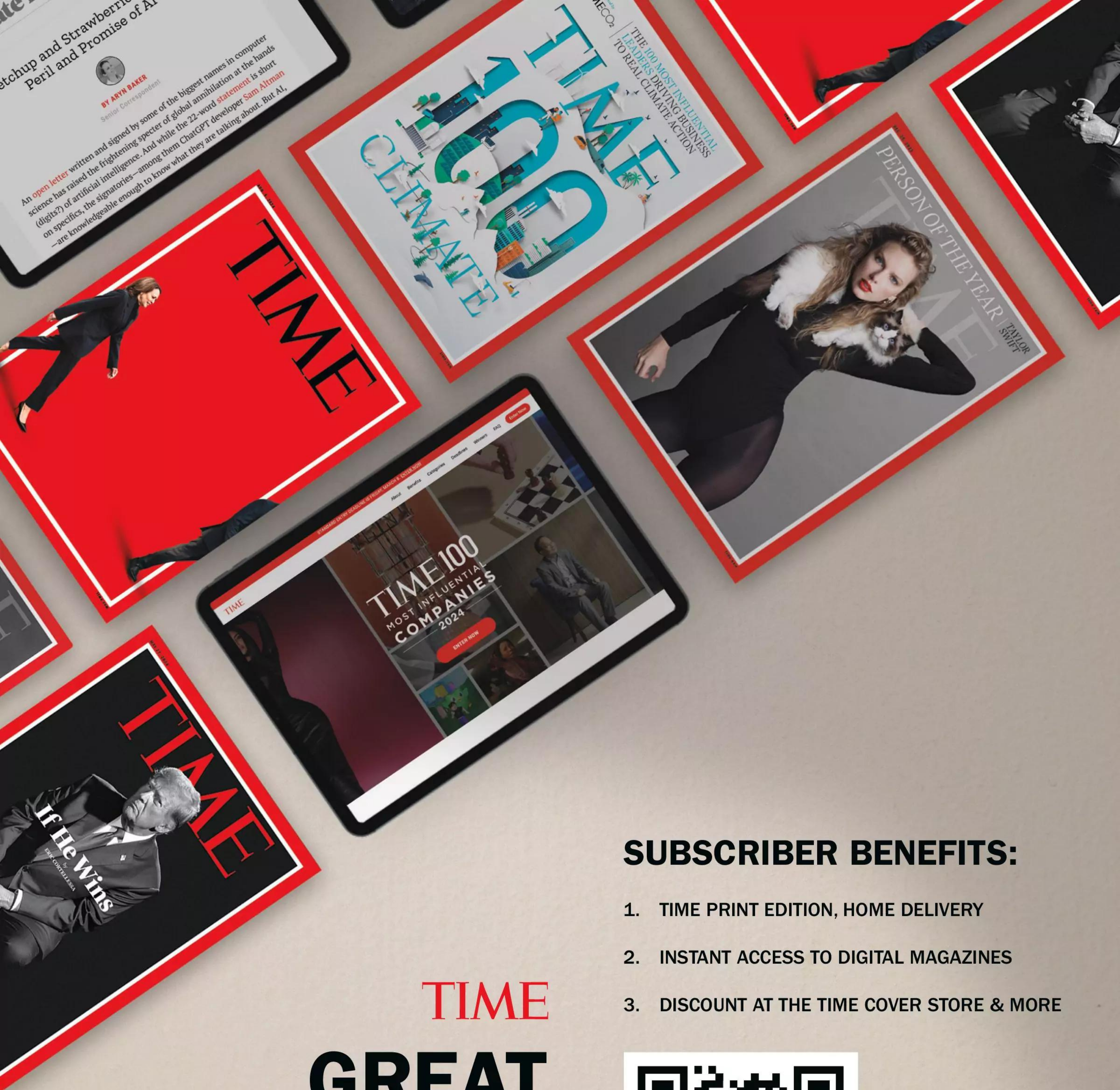
American Sign Language or Black American Sign Language. Luckily, after Keivonn's mom April Jackson-Woodard sent in his audition video in response to a casting call on X, it quickly became clear he was the one. "I don't think I'll ever get that lucky again," Mazin says.

Last summer, Keivonn was "shocked" to learn that he had been nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series for his performance, making him the youngest actor ever to be recognized in the category and the first Black Deaf actor in the Television Academy's history to secure a nomination. "When I saw my name and face up onscreen," he says, "it was like ... 'Whoa.'"

Now, he'll star in Anslem Richardson's short film *Fractal* and is set to appear in Stephen Ashley Blake's debut feature, *Steal Away*. To Keivonn, these are all opportunities to continue making Deaf people feel more seen. "Most people [in TV and film] are hearing, so you just see people talking," he says. "But when I see Deaf people and they're using sign language, I understand what they're saying. Showing Deaf people playing Deaf characters is authentic and extremely important."

KEIVONN  
WOODARD AS  
SAM BURRELL ON  
*THE LAST OF US*





TIME

# GREAT THINGS TAKE TIME

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# Madhvi Chittoor

ADVOCATING FOR THE EARTH

By Sanya Mansoor

When Madhvi Chittoor of Arvada, Colo., learned at the age of 6 that PFAS “for-ever chemicals” are found in all sorts of consumer products, she wanted to warn everyone. So she started with one person: Colorado state senator Lisa Cutter, a strong advocate for the environment. Cutter agreed to meet, and in 2021 she sat down with Madhvi—accompanied by her mom—at a Panera.

They talked about how PFAS, a group of manufactured chemicals used in consumer products since the 1940s, have made their way into drinking water, soil, food products, and the air. Peer-reviewed studies have found that exposure to certain levels of PFAS can lead to negative developmental effects in children, decreased fertility, increased risk of some cancers, reduced immune function, and increased cholesterol levels. Cutter already knew a little about PFAS but not enough to push her toward drafting a bill about them. Madhvi, she says, “really planted the seed.”

The following year, Cutter went on to sponsor a bill that bans “intentionally added” PFAS in a wide range of consumer goods, from cosmetics to carpets. In an effort to garner support for the legislation, Madhvi testified at the state Capitol and spent months emailing with Governor Jared Polis. After the bill passed, Polis recognized Madhvi’s hard work, inviting her to the bill signing in 2022 and giving her the pen he used.

It was not the first time that Cutter and Madhvi worked together. In 2021, after Cutter proposed a measure to ban single-use plastic bags in major retail stores and plastic-foam containers in restaurants, Madhvi advocated for that bill too—speaking with mayors and businesses, and conducting a signature campaign. At the beginning of this year, that measure finally took full effect.

“We are proud to have young people like Madhvi who are working to protect this place we love now and for future generations,” Polis told TIME in a statement. “We were honored to have Madhvi join us for the bill signing, especially



because of her advocacy and leadership in this area. I have no doubt that Madhvi is just getting started, and we can’t wait to see what she does next.”

And Madhvi, now 13, isn’t resting on her laurels: “There’s still more that needs to be banned, like [PFAS] in toilet paper and cleaning products,” she says.

She has kept up her advocacy locally and abroad. In 2022, she was chosen as a child adviser to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, and gave a speech at its headquarters in Geneva about kids’ rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. And on a recent vacation in her family’s hometown of Chennai, India, she found time to organize a beach cleanup and speak at schools about pollution.

Despite her young age, Madhvi’s experience with environmental advocacy goes deep. Even before the plastic-foam law, she had already encouraged Jefferson County, Colorado, to switch to compostable lunch trays in all of its public schools. In 2021,

she and the school district broke the Guinness World Record for most markers (more than 22,000) collected

for recycling in one hour. Outside of advocacy, Madhvi plays piano and violin, writes music, and is a black belt in tae kwon do—earning her nicknames like “no-plastic ninja.”

For her peers who want to get involved in environmental action but don’t know where to start, Madhvi recommends reaching out to elected officials. “If they say no once, keep going and keep asking,” she says. Cutter admires that determination—and is sure that other lawmakers would too. “I would be shocked if any legislator on any side of the aisle would turn down a kid,” she says. Environmental bills are often lobbied against by big corporations, Cutter notes, adding, “When we have young people ... reaching out and advocating, it’s really helpful.”

MADHVI CHITTOOR AT A RIVER-CLEANUP EVENT SHE CO-ORGANIZED IN DENVER



# TIME

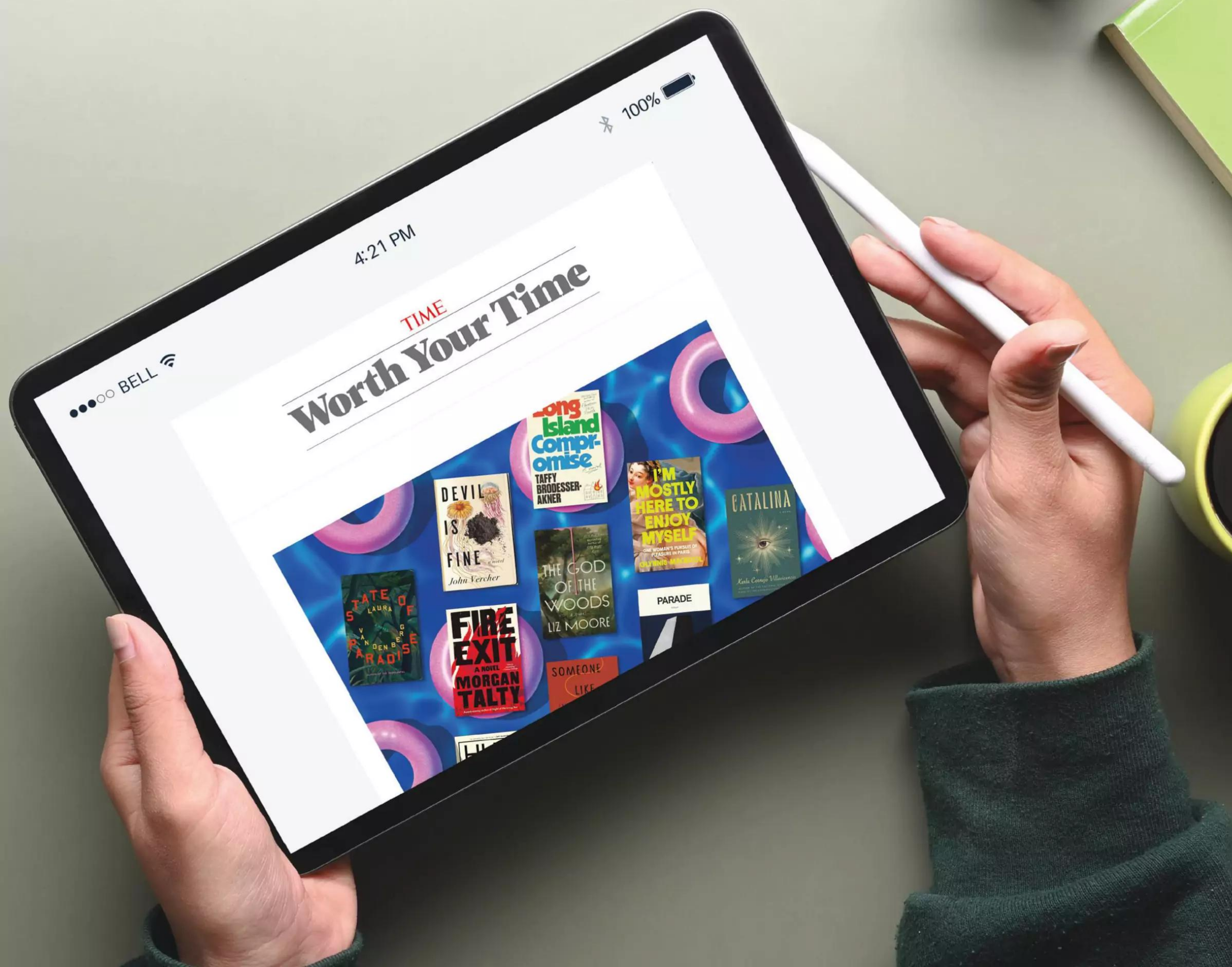
## WORTH YOUR TIME

Looking for a new show to watch or book to read this weekend? We have plenty of recommendations. Get them in your inbox every Friday.



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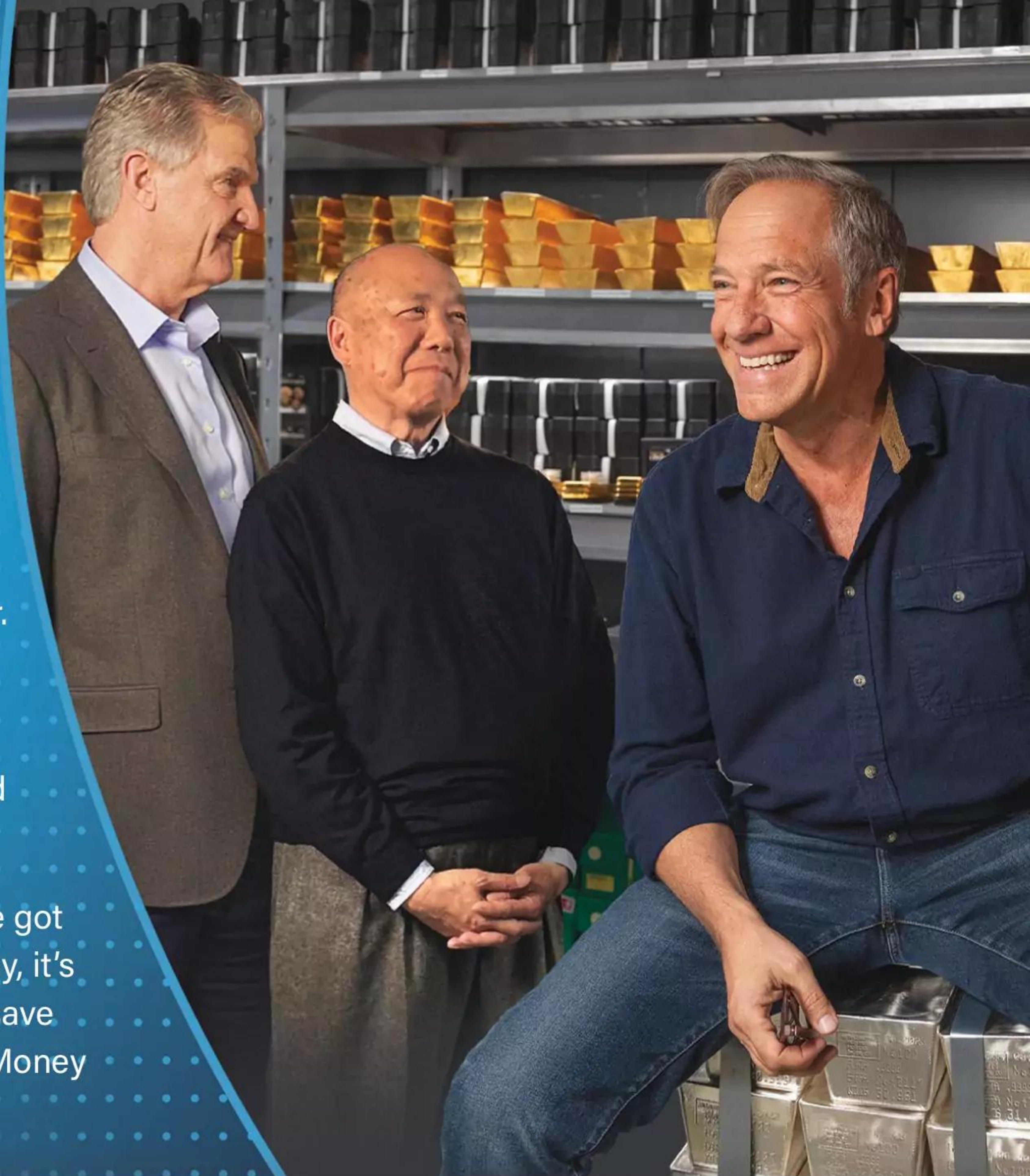


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# Time Off



*A romance  
extravaganza*

INSIDE

CASEY MCQUISTON ON THE POWER AND  
PLEASURE OF THE ROMANCE NOVEL

THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
ROMANCE-NOVEL BOOK JACKET

... AND THE 50 BEST ROMANCE NOVELS  
TO READ RIGHT NOW



# Romance is literature

BY CASEY MCQUISTON

CHECK THE FURTHERMOST PART OF THE BOOKSTORE. On the left, all the way to the back, down the stairs, past mythology and social sciences. It’s the shelf on the end, the one filled with paperback spines as bright and colorful as conversation hearts. Or maybe it’s between the tabloids and the chewing gum at the supermarket checkout, a display of purse-size books splashed with images of hands clutching waists.

Whatever the case, what you’re looking for will be tucked safely away, curated into corners, never neighboring the “serious” literature. After all, it’s not literature, is it? It’s romance. A guilty pleasure, a pulpy secret, a frivolous bit of fluff. The romance novel is so present in American life—nearly a quarter of adult print fiction sold—that many of us already have an opinion before we’ve ever opened one.

In a speech included in her collection *Words Are My Matter*, fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin shared her thoughts on literary critics who judge genre fiction without bothering to take it seriously, saying they “will make fools of themselves, because they don’t know how to read the book. They have no contextual information to tell them what its tradition is, where it’s coming from, what it’s trying to do, what it does.”

I can’t say how many of us have made fools of ourselves over romance at some point in our literary lives, but as a writer and reader of romance myself, I see it all the time. It’s as common as a kiss. Strangers to the genre dismiss romance with the speed and frequency of a rakish duke inciting a scandal. Standing before the collection of works on TIME’s list of The 50 Best Romance Novels to Read Right Now, I have to ask: Why?

**IF WE EXPECT** a great novel to tell us about humanity, romance holds a mirror to our wants and needs. If we want to study works that sit within a greater literary tradition, romance has one of the richest. And if the classification of “literature” implies an attention to craft, a specific point of view, a measure of scholarly rigor, or some broader thematic meaning beyond the text—frankly, I’ve read a hundred romance novels that offer all of those plus a full-frontal bonus.



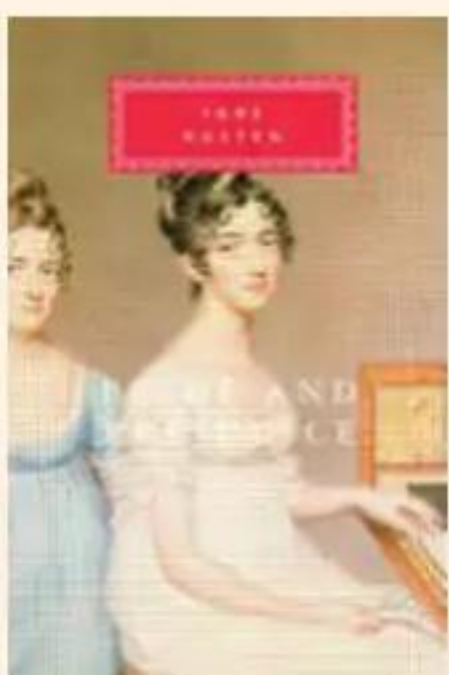
Take, for example, one of the oldest traditions of the genre: the conditional inheritance, in which an heir or heiress can’t gain control of their fortune until they’ve wed. Frances Burney codified the trope when she published her romance of manners *Cecilia* in 1782, and we can trace a straight line from the sought-after orphan Cecilia to Georgette Heyer’s desperate, slutty Viscount Sheringham in *Friday’s Child* a century and a half later. Slide forward through time,

## The 50 Best Romance Novels To Read Right Now

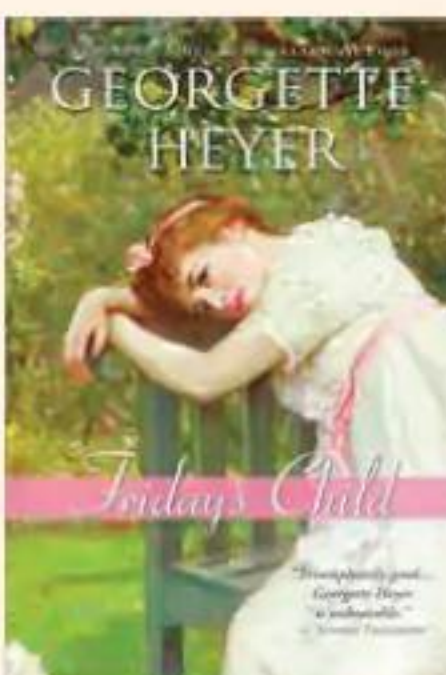
Listed in order of publication, from 1782 to 2023



**Cecilia**  
Frances Burney



**Pride and Prejudice**  
Jane Austen



**Friday's Child**  
Georgette Heyer



**The Price of Salt**  
Claire Morgan



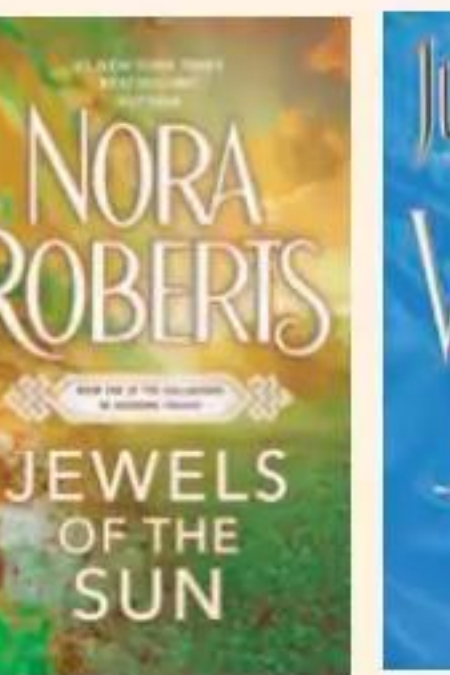
**Lord of Scoundrels**  
Loretta Chase



**Indigo**  
Beverly Jenkins



**If Only It Were True**  
Marc Levy



**Jewels of the Sun**  
Nora Roberts



**The Viscount Who Loved Me**  
Julia Quinn



**Twilight**  
Stephenie Meyer



**A Hunger Like No Other**  
Kresley Cole





a shared set of tools over 350 years. Discerning romance readers know a good romance because they know what those tools can produce in capable hands.

If we really want to get into it, we can talk about how Jane Austen may have pulled her most famous title from the final chapter of *Cecilia*, which includes the line “The whole of this unfortunate business has been the result of pride and prejudice.” We can talk about *Pride and Prejudice* drawing the blueprint for thousands of romances about enemies softening into lovers and brooding loners falling for scrappy spitfires (including in my own novel *Red, White & Royal Blue*). We can talk about Austen’s Mr. Darcy and Charlotte Brontë’s Mr. Rochester and the Byronic hero, and how every contemporary romance with a moody, thawable romantic lead plays with our attachment to and expectations of that character.

But I’d rather talk about the reason all this matters, and the delicious challenge of crafting romance: the intimate relationship between the work and the reader.

Romance is, above all, an emotional composition. It’s a magic trick that turns words on a page into pleasure chemicals in the brain. The tropes and traditions of the genre represent hundreds of years of practice not simply mimicking the sensation and aesthetics of longing and release but actually conjuring them in the reader. For the spell to work, you need the reader’s total trust. A good romance writer has the skills, the instincts, the empathy, the vulnerability, and the genre-savviness to earn it.

The best romance writers know exactly how long to hold a pause to make your palms sweat or which adjective will suggest a slight hint of softness under a character’s steely exterior—just enough for the reader to see it, but not so much that the object of their affections will notice yet, of course. They understand the small embarrassments and victories of human connection. They lay details with precision and intent, from a specific in-season bloom on a tree in a garden-set love

confession to the faintest brush of a hand. They can draw on a reference that cuts right to your heart. They command the rhythms of attraction and resistance. I mean, I’ve read romances that can

make you feel actual chest pains with the painstaking removal of thoroughly researched, historically accurate undergarments.

I often wonder if all this is why some are reluctant to take romance seriously. Even at its cheekiest or darkest or most satirical, it’s a genre made of sincerity. Opening ourselves earnestly to an emotional experience feels dangerous, and danger makes us nervous, and when we’re nervous, we laugh.

But if we don’t laugh, if we don’t turn away, if we stop pretending to be too cool or too intellectual or too ironic to acknowledge our own desire, romance has so much to show us about ourselves. Which is exactly what literature should do.

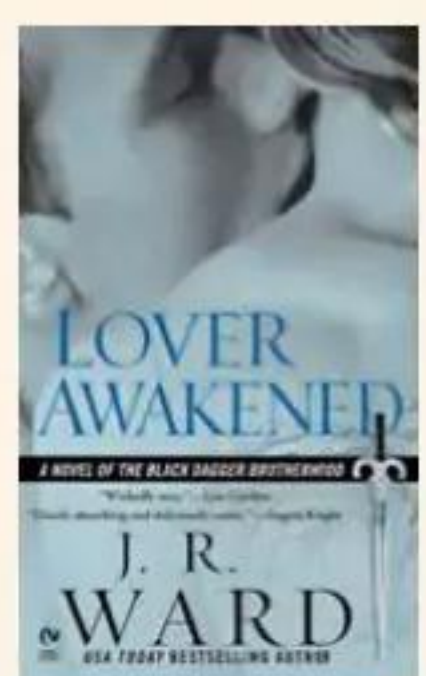
## FOR THE SPELL TO WORK, YOU NEED THE READER’S TOTAL TRUST

*McQuiston is the best-selling author of Red, White & Royal Blue, One Last Stop, I Kissed Shara Wheeler, and The Pairing*

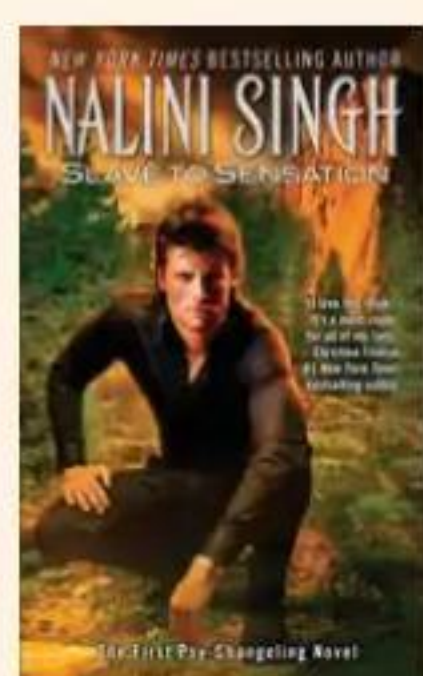
through the marriage-of-convenience bodice rippers of the ’80s and ’90s, to the 21st century, where an R&B heiress marries the bagpipe player from her aunt’s funeral in Rebekah Weatherspoon’s *Xeni* and a chef fakes a relationship—and high-stakes cooking partnership—with a stranger in order to secure his grandfather’s approval and family fortune in TJ Alexander’s *Chef’s Choice*. All of these books are in conversation with one another, brought into existence by writers whetting



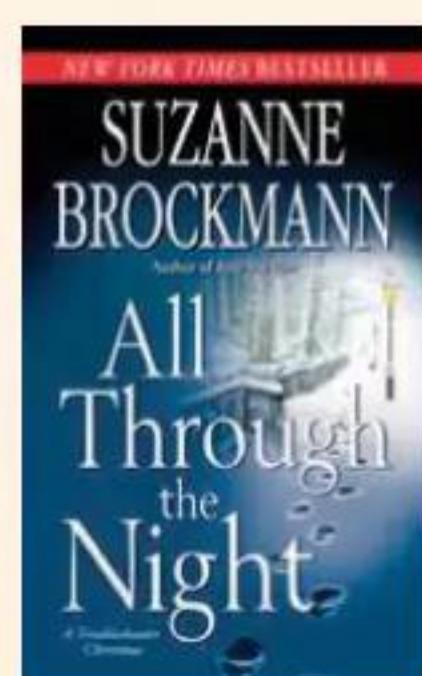
**Devil in Winter**  
Lisa Kleypas



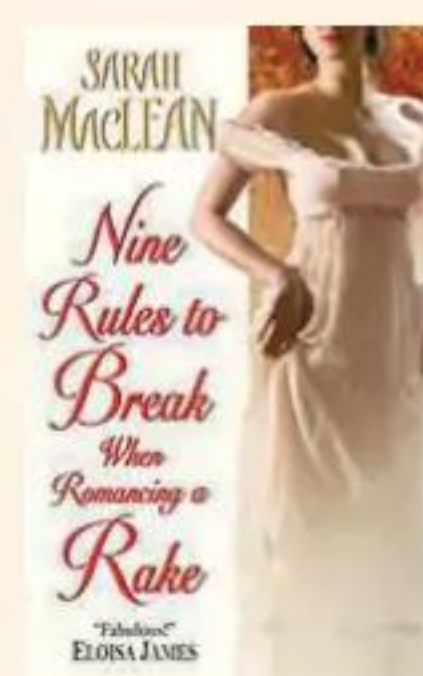
**Lover Awakened**  
J.R. Ward



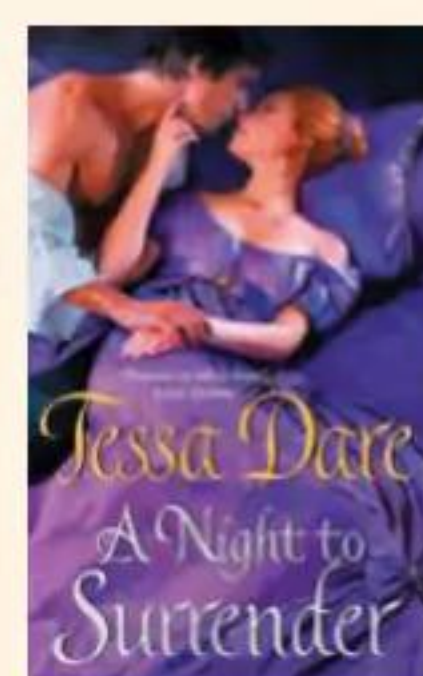
**Slave to Sensation**  
Nalini Singh



**All Through the Night**  
Suzanne Brockmann



**Nine Rules to Break When Romancing a Rake**  
Sarah MacLean



**A Night to Surrender**  
Tessa Dare



**Crazy Rich Asians**  
Kevin Kwan



**The Lotus Palace**  
Jeannie Lin



**The Luckiest Lady in London**  
Sherry Thomas



**To All the Boys I've Loved Before**  
Jenny Han



**All In**  
Simona Ahrnstedt



**An Extraordinary Union**  
Alyssa Cole



**Wildfire**  
Ilona Andrews





## Love at first sight

BY OLIVIA B. WAXMAN

AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS MODELING career in the '80s, Fabio Lanzoni, better known simply as Fabio, says he was shooting up to 10 romance-book covers a day. With his blond tresses flowing and his shirt unbuttoned or off altogether, his goal was to be readers' "fantasy."

These days, romance-novel covers have a different look, but even as the visuals have evolved over time—from human models to suggestive portraits of fruit to more chaste, cartoonish illustrations—one thing has remained constant: with this genre, what you see is what you get. The cover of a romance novel sets the expectation of a love story with a happy ending.

Here's a look at major styles of romance-novel covers, and some of the genre's most influential designs, through the decades.

### Early roots in the World War II era

SEE: *W.A.A.F. INTO WIFE* BY BARBARA STANTON

The origins of the modern romance cover can be traced to the Second World War, which coincided with the rise of mass-market pulp paperbacks, often featuring illustrations that were only loosely related to the stories inside. Romance novels were different—their covers, often resembling movie posters, featured images that directly connected to the plot. The genre was first popularized in the U.K., with books like Barbara Stanton's 1943 war-time romance *W.A.A.F. Into Wife*, the cover of which featured a pilot gazing longingly at a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

### The rise of the clinch cover

SEE: *THE FLAME AND THE FLOWER* BY KATHLEEN E. WOODIWISS AND *NIGHT SONG* BY BEVERLY JENKINS

Amid the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, romance jackets evolved with the culture. Enter the clinch cover: book jackets featuring a couple in a passionate embrace. Kathleen E. Woodiwiss' 1972 novel *The Flame and the Flower*, an essential text in the historical-romance canon, featured an illustration of a woman in a vulnerable pose, hugged up against her burly lover.

With the rise of the clinch cover came the introduction of photographic depictions of a (typically shirtless) hero and a (typically long-haired)

heroine overcome with desire. In the 1980s and 1990s, these covers became even more sexualized—as women enjoyed more freedom to explore relationships with multiple romantic partners in life, that reality was reflected in fiction. More scantily clad men appeared on romance-book covers to appeal to female readers, and the stories centered on more female protagonists who had full, complex lives outside of their romantic relationships.

"The 1980s and 1990s saw women not only in the larger workforce, but also not just dying to meet a man and settle down," says John Markert, author of *Publishing Romance*, a 2016 history of the romance-book industry. "These are the contemporary

### A VISUAL EVOLUTION







**Last Night at the Telegraph Club** Malinda Lo  
**Seven Days in June** Tia Williams  
**A Caribbean Heiress in Paris** Adriana Herrera  
**Before I Let Go** Kennedy Ryan  
**Book Lovers** Emily Henry  
**Dating Dr. Dil** Nisha Sharma  
**Honey & Spice** Bolu Babalola  
**Icebreaker** Hannah Grace  
**Part of Your World** Abby Jimenez  
**The Very Secret Society of Irregular Witches** Sangu Mandanna  
**The Vibrant Years** Sonali Dev  
**Chef's Choice** TJ Alexander  
**Love, Theoretically** Ali Hazelwood

romances, and we see women who are divorced or who have to choose between two sexually attractive men, both of whom they might well be having sexual relations with.”

The 1980s and 1990s were also the era of the supermodel, and Fabio became the de facto face of the clinch cover. In 1994, Beverly Jenkins’ *Night Song* became the first all-Black clinch cover from a major publisher.

## Step-back covers

**SEE:** *SOMETHING WONDERFUL* BY JUDITH MCNAUGHT

Not everyone wanted to be seen totting a book with a raunchy image in public, so some publishers started producing “step-back” jackets in the

late 1980s and early 1990s to provide some (literal) cover for shyer readers. Popularized by the success of books by authors like Judith McNaught, who wrote historical-romance titles like *Something Wonderful* (1988), step-back covers would typically feature a landscape—but when readers turned the page, they’d find a second, more graphic clinch-type cover.

## Single objects

**SEE:** *TWILIGHT* BY STEPHENIE MEYER AND *FIFTY SHADES OF GREY* BY E.L. JAMES

The 2000s proved that sometimes less is more. The designers behind jackets for Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* and E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey* series favored single objects under a spotlight against a clean, black background, like an apple or a knotted necktie. The books in Maya Banks’ *Sweet* series each featured a different juicy fruit, the choice of which was a carefully calibrated decision. Notes Erin Galloway, a publicity director who worked on the Banks books: “We couldn’t use a banana.”

## Going graphic

**SEE:** *THE WEDDING DATE* BY JASMINE GUILLORY AND *RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE* BY CASEY MCQUISTON

Cartoonish illustrations—friendly, brightly colored images of two people doing nonscandalous things like sitting at a table, lying on adjacent beach towels, or gently embracing—have become the dominant style in recent years. One influential example: Jasmine Guillory’s 2018 debut, *The Wedding Date*. The silhouettes on the bold, red jacket are a callback to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*—and the overall intent of the illustration was to appeal to consumers who might not think of themselves as romance readers. “Everyone can point to that book as a starting point for this new interest

in illustrated covers,” says Cindy Hwang, vice president and editorial director of Berkley, which publishes Guillory and other big-name writers like Emily Henry and Ali Hazelwood. “That did exactly what we had hoped.” (*The Wedding Date* has sold more than 200,000 copies to date.)

Commissioning graphic illustrations is also more cost-efficient than producing photo shoots with models. “It was nice that people’s interest coincided with a way to save money,” Hwang notes, but she adds that readers had been asking for covers that left more to the imagination—like showing just torsos—because they wanted to be able to envision the characters their own way. Age is also a factor—for YA romance novels, which have a wide-ranging readership, publishers have been able to avoid alienating older readers by offering ageless illustrated figures. There is one nuance here that designers have to navigate, which is that with generalized jacket images comes the risk of an unwelcome surprise for those who don’t want to read extended scenes featuring throbbing body parts. “A lot of people think that the cartoon cover doesn’t depict how spicy the content is inside of the actual books,” says Mel Saavedra, founder of Steamy Lit bookstore in Deerfield Beach, Fla.

The biggest plus of the current trend is an emphasis on inclusivity. Like the rest of the publishing industry, romance books have long been dominated by straight, white, heteronormative, and able-bodied authors telling stories about characters who look like them—but in recent years, a growing number of authors have published books that reflect the diversity of the world we live in. That means book jackets are also becoming more inclusive, allowing readers more opportunities to see themselves reflected on and rolling around within romance novels.



**Single objects**  
 Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* and E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey*

**Graphic illustrations**  
 Jasmine Guillory’s *The Wedding Date* and Casey McQuiston’s *Red, White & Royal Blue*



## CHINA WATCH

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

## Fanning a resurgence in a cool identity

Master artisans dedicated to a craft established deep in the national psyche

BY ZHAO XU

Nearly three decades have passed, but 57-year-old Xu Jiadong still remembers the day when he first went into a bamboo forest with his father to “handpick the ones that he would later use to make the ribs of folding fans.”

It was in early January in Anji county of Zhejiang province, where a special type of bamboo known as *yu zhu*, or “jade bamboo,” grows in abundance.

That is where Xu, then in his late 20s, was given lessons by his father while breathing in the chilly mountain air.

“For the purpose of fan-making, bamboo can neither be too young nor too old,” Xu says. “It has to be big and sturdy enough but also fine-textured. Generally speaking, plants that have grown to 5 years old are the most desirable,” Xu says.

“One thing my father always asked me to look for was the natural layer of white, waxy substance coating the plant.”

This is bamboo wax, and when scraped off, the green color underneath is revealed, giving it the name jade bamboo. The wax shields the plant from excessive moisture loss and pests, giving it a smooth, suave quality long admired by fan-makers including Xu and his father.

“Artists from ancient China often painted wind-swept or rain-slashed bamboo plants, inspired equally by their unbreakability and flexibility,”



An ancient painting from Boston's Museum of Fine Arts shows a couple having fun with fan-painting. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

says Wang Yimin, an expert on ancient Chinese painting at the Palace Museum in Beijing. “It’s also worth noting that *jie*, the Chinese character for bamboo nodes, can mean integrity and rectitude.”

By the time the folding fan was popular in the country in the 14th century, bamboo had long entered the Chinese visual and literary iconography, a powerful symbol for those who would like to think of themselves as men of virtue.

It is in the ineffable concept of aesthetic sophistication that Xu’s ultimate challenge lies. “It’s all there in the lines and in each and every turn — some rather abrupt, some so gentle that they are hardly perceptible — that the lines took,” says Xu, celebrated today as one of the country’s best makers of folding fan ribs.

“As long as you get graceful

lines, you get graceful forms.”

That gracefulness is best appreciated when the folding fan is folded, with two pieces of bamboo slips holding the entire fan together. As these two pieces taper down from top to bottom, they follow distinct curves in designs named beautifully and evocatively, for example “the shoulder of a beauty.”

Typically, these two pieces dubbed the main ribs, in contrast with the minor ones in between them, fan out a little toward the very end. Swallowtail is the name assigned to one specific type of design concerning this end part.

“Controlled spontaneity” is how Wu Jiajun, who has been training with Xu during his spare time for the past three years, describes “what it takes to produce that level of artistry that my teacher has arrived at.”

“I realized that more often than not, the contour of a main rib is decided within a few applications of the carving knife,” Wu says. “There’s only one knife for the entire process.”

“Sometimes the knife glides through the material in an extended motion; at other times it makes quick, decisive cuts. Either way, there is absolutely no repeat of the same movement. One has the feeling that the master, guided by instinct, always gets to say what he has intended to say with just one fluid and resolute stroke of the knife.”

In that sense, there is little difference between carving the fan

ribs and painting a fan. The latter, done in classical Chinese style with an ink brush, is also characterized by a combination of precision and spontaneity.

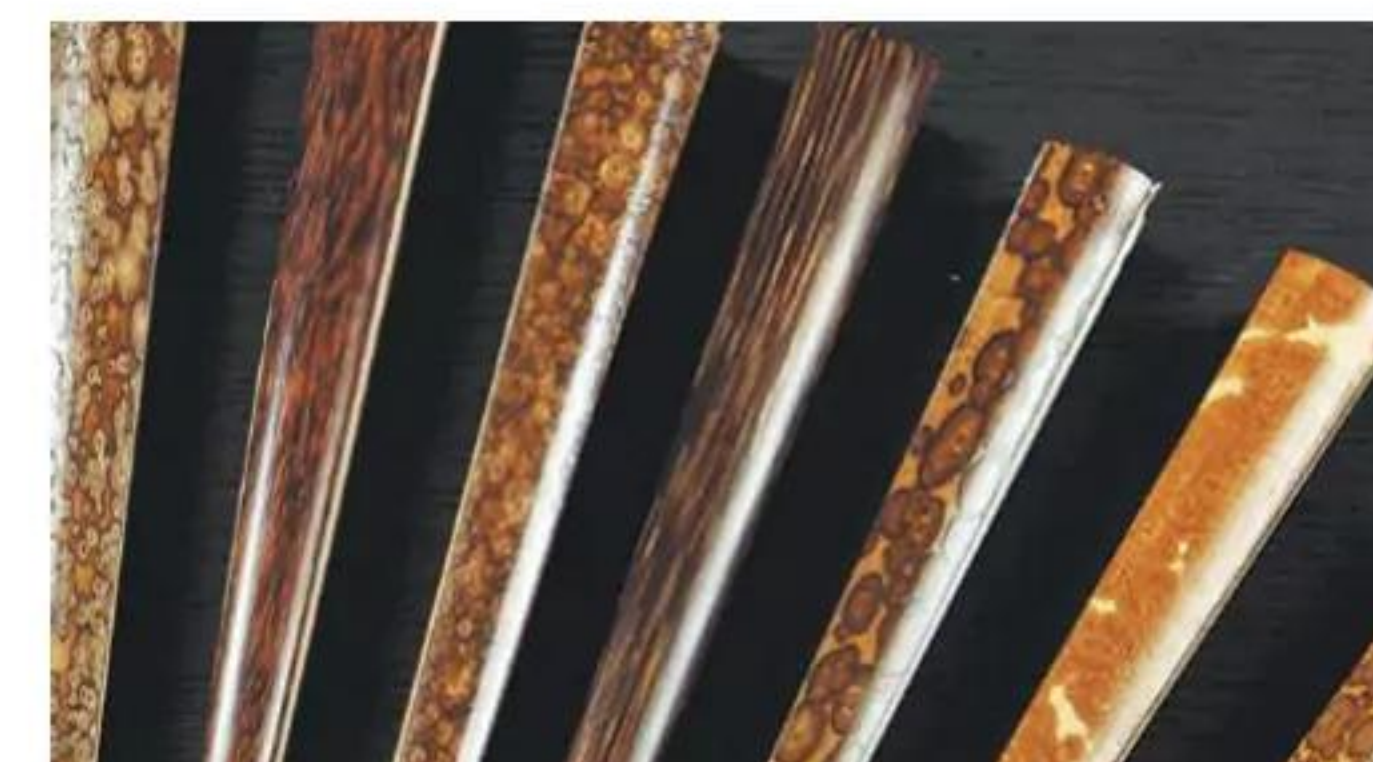
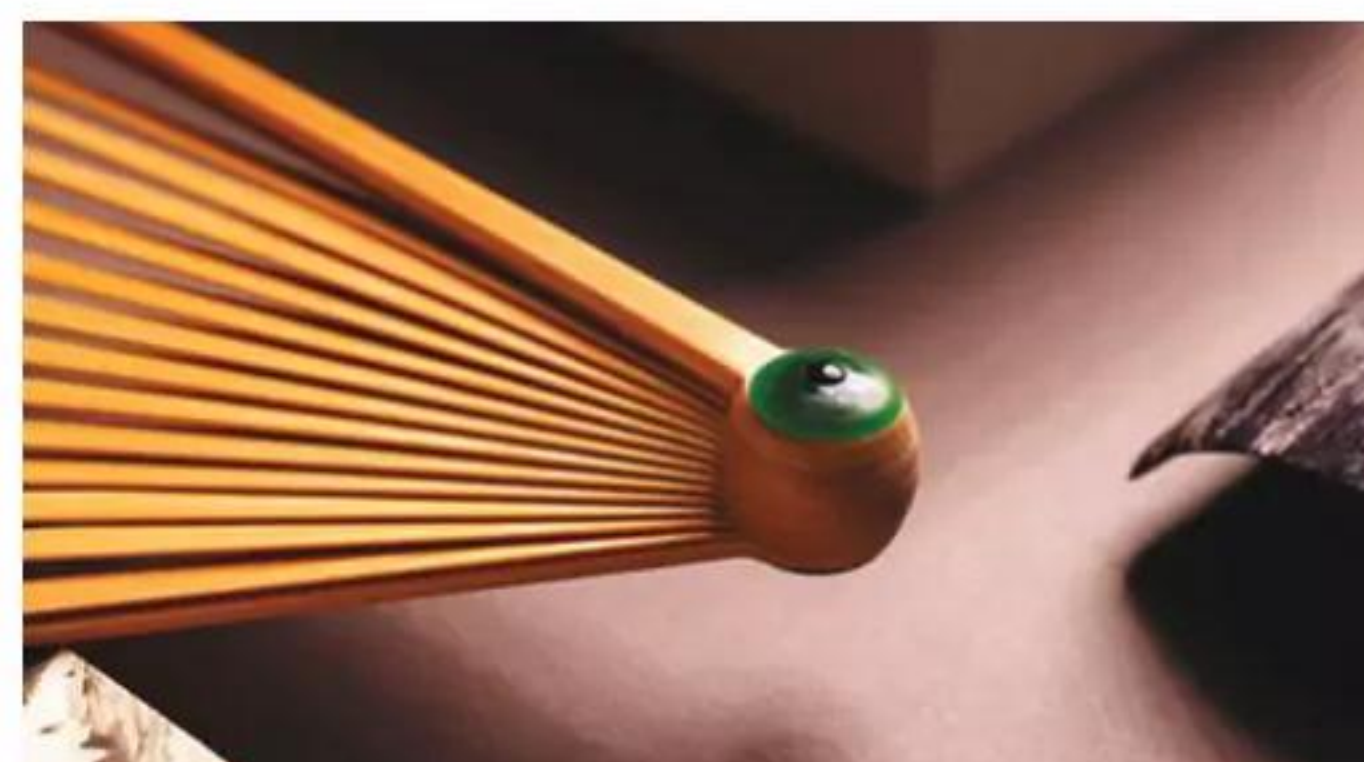
“One thing my father taught me was to think of the knife as a brush,” Xu says.

“In fan-making, polishing is routinely done to the carved ribs, but my father often reminded me not to overdo it. ‘Don’t gloss away all the traces of your knife,’ he would say. ‘Because they are indicators of an authentic work of art.’”

One could say that a beautiful set of fan ribs takes the work of both man and nature. While the monochromatic “jade bamboo” (also known as *mao zhu* or tortoiseshell bamboo) exudes an understated elegance, other types favored by fan-makers feature naturally formed patterns that have been compared to spots carried by sika deer, a species native to East Asia.

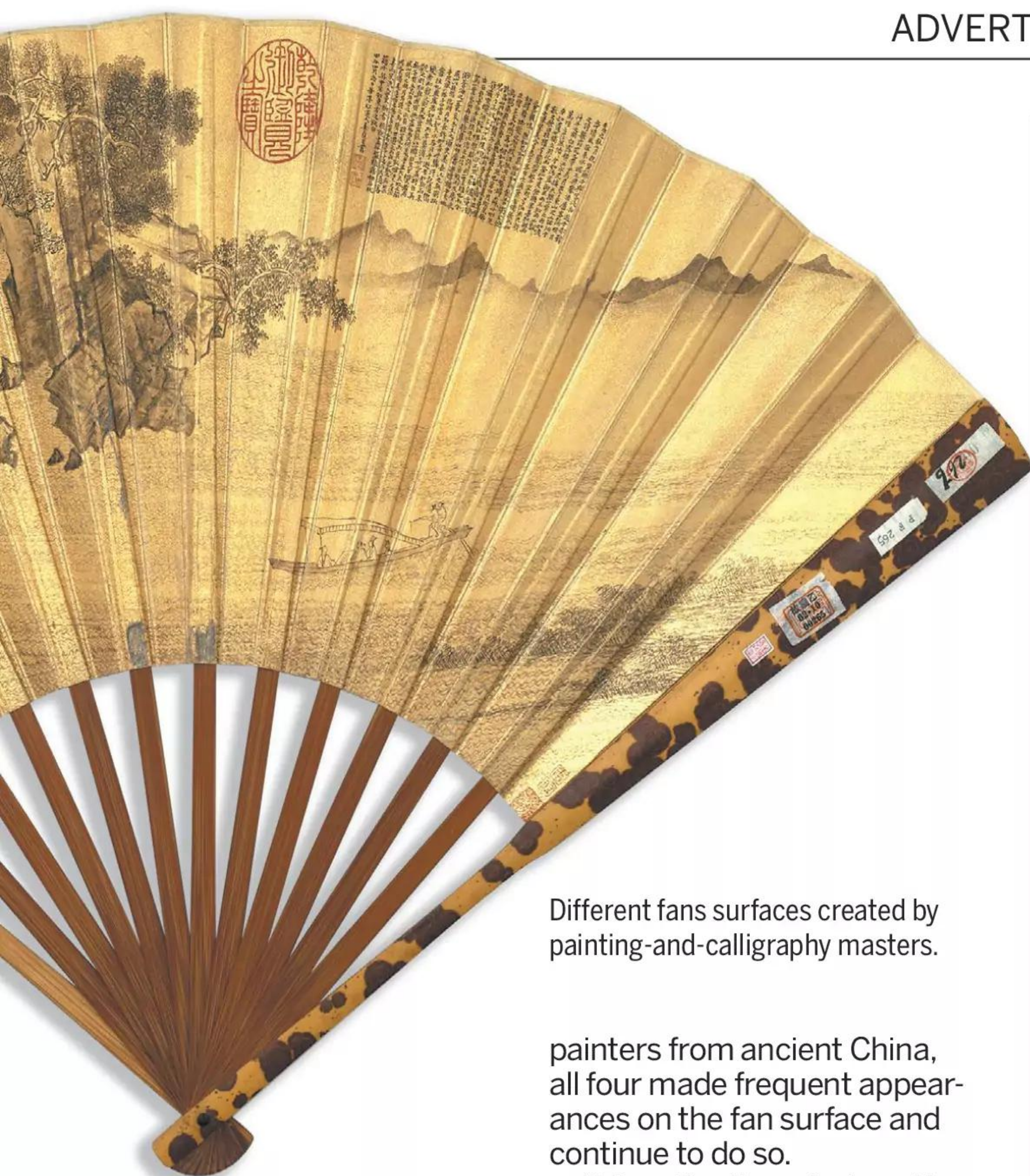
“We call the deer *meihua lu*, or the plum-blossom deer, and the bamboo plum-deer bamboo,” Xu says, pointing out that the unique pattern has formed on the plant as a result of microorganism infection.

The plum tree, which typically blooms during winter, is one of the so-called four noble plants of Chinese culture, the other three being bamboo, the chrysanthemum and the orchid. A standard subject for literati



From left: Fan-maker Xu Jiadong, 57; a pair of fans made by Xu; detail of Xu's fan; bamboo fan ribs with patterns formed as a result of microorganism infection.





Different fans surfaces created by painting-and-calligraphy masters.



painters from ancient China, all four made frequent appearances on the fan surface and continue to do so.

"Literati culture, fostered by the educated elite of ancient Chinese society, exerted a major influence on Chinese art-making for more than a thousand years," says Wang of the Palace Museum.

"Only with an understanding of that can one begin to see the folding fan not just as something to drive away the summer heat, but a portable piece of art, almost every detail of which is dictated by the sensibilities of the literati group."

Xu's father first learned to make fan ribs in the mid-1940s when he was about 15. He did so as an apprentice in a fan-making workshop in Suzhou — there were about 40 to 60 in the city in those days, says Xu.

His studio's rear window opens up to one of the numerous canals, which the city in Jiangsu province has been known for throughout history.

"Historically, 'made-in-Suzhou' had been a brand name of its own, denoting consummate artisanship infused with the region's long-standing tradition of literati culture," Xu says.

"Over centuries, the folding fans produced by the Suzhou artist-artisans had traveled the waterways between the city and the rest of China, where they commanded great followings."

## Cultural roots spread in elegant style

BY ZHAO XU

One day in the early 1920s Luo Yinggong (1872-1924), one of China's most talented playwright-cum-Peking Opera impresarios, bought an unpainted folding fan from a collector-official with 40 gold ingots.

The main ribs of the fan were carved out of a special type of bamboo whose round, dark-colored patterns, resulting from microorganism infection, were reputed to have been formed as the sad tears of two bereaved ladies fell on the plant.

They were grieving the death of their husband, the legendary Emperor Shun whom some Chinese historians believe lived between 2200 and 2300 B.C.

Equipped with the fan, Luo knocked on the door of the much revered painter Qi Baishi (1864-1957), whose brilliantly painted pair of butterflies would later appear on one side of the fan, along with his calligraphic transcription of a butterfly-themed poem by another of his equally renowned contemporaries.

There was now only one thing left to do: to record the event on the other side of the fan, which Luo did himself, noting that the fan "was meant as a birthday gift for Mr. Mei" (Mei Lanfang, a master performer of Peking Opera).

Having written in the same inscription that "a thing (of beauty) will certainly be passed down across generations," Luo probably would not have been surprised when the fan was put up for auction in Beijing nearly 90 years later, in November 2011, when it fetched 3.22 million yuan (\$444,100).

A folding fan, apart from fanning gentle waves of cool air, could also be a veritable work of art, a statement accessory testifying to its bearer's

standing, especially in cultural circles.

"That's what set the folding fan apart from other types of fans that appeared in Chinese history," says Yang Danxia, an expert on ancient Chinese painting at the Palace Museum in Beijing. "The circular-shaped *tuanshan*, or palace fan, was used almost exclusively by women."

According to Yang, despite their modern usage, both the folding fan and the palace fan probably originated as items of etiquette.

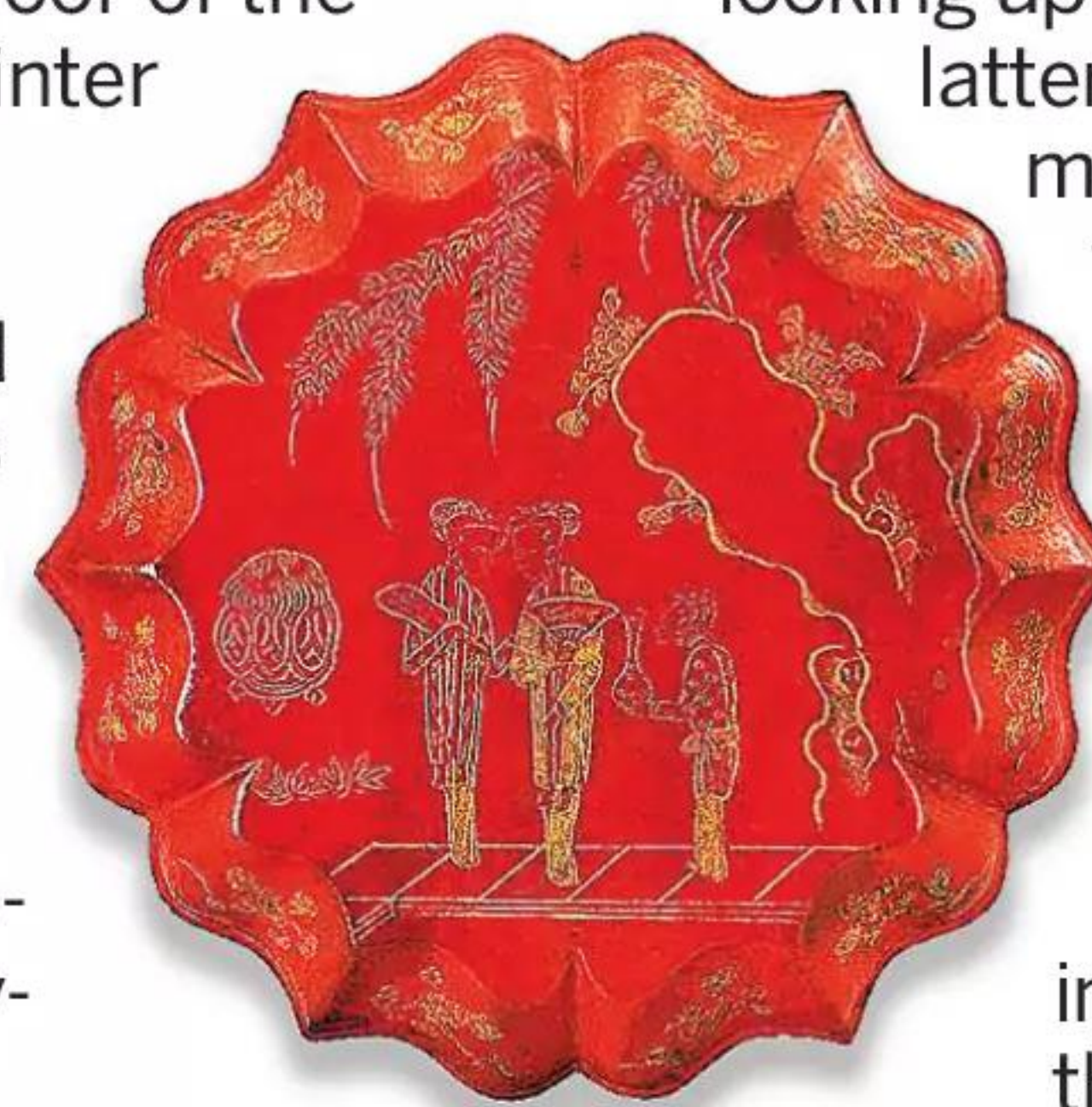
Held up to face level, they served as small screens between a fan holder and someone who was probably in a much-higher position, so that the former would not be looking up directly into the latter's eyes during a meeting between the two.

In 1978 a multilayered, red-lacquered makeup box was discovered in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, in a tomb dating to the Southern Song period (1127-1279).

In the design on its cover, highlighted in gold, two well-dressed young ladies appear in the middle of a manicured garden, waited on by an attendant. While the one on the left is holding a palm leaf of a fan, the one on the right holds a painted folding fan.

"Throughout China's Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, painting, calligraphy and poetry were dubbed the three perfections and were required of a cultured man. A folding fan was carried around as a showcase, if not of a man's own literary and artistic talent, then at least his taste in such matters," Yang says.

That may explain why, within those six centuries, many who had established themselves in the overlapping worlds of art and poetry created fan art.



A red-lacquered makeup box from the Southern Song period (1127-1279), featuring a lady holding a folding fan on its cover.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## FEATURE

# Captains of Industry set sail

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

IT WAS PERHAPS INEVITABLE THAT THE CAST OF *INDUSTRY* would find themselves on a yacht. The show, which follows a group of Gen Z bankers working in the City, London's Wall Street, focuses as much on its characters taking designer drugs in Berlin clubs or having sex in the office as it does on them making high-stakes trades. Which is to say they party hard—and, this season, they do it on a vessel off the coast of Mallorca. That this pivotal scene was actually shot in the Mediterranean and not some oversize bathtub on the show's usual soundstage in the damp and cloudy city of Cardiff, Wales, is one of many signs that *Industry* is getting a glow-up. "Mallorca was a nice change of scenery," jokes star Marisa Abela over a video call.

In the opening scene of the third season, which premieres on HBO on Aug. 11, Abela's character Yasmin leans over the railing of the *Lady Yasmin*, named after her by her publishing-magnate father. She takes drags of a cigarette between glugs of champagne. When she turns around, her face is streaked with tears. A gawker snaps a picture, which will wind up in the tabloids, reminiscent of paparazzi shots of Princess Diana or Amy Winehouse, the latter of whom Abela played in a biopic this year. One might be tempted to say, "Poor little rich girl," if we hadn't spent two seasons watching her relationship with her father deteriorate.

Yasmin's American friend Harper (Myha'la), adorned with tattoos and designer sunglasses, tells her curtly, but not without compassion, "You have to stop crying." It's a brief moment, but one the show will return to in repeated flashbacks. Because unlike past seasons, this one focuses on a mystery. Yasmin's father, who it turns out is a crook, has disappeared. His last known location: this yacht.

HBO is finally giving the show the coveted Sunday-night slot previously occupied by *Succession* and *Game of Thrones*, and has cast the latter series' star Kit Harington as a series regular, its most high-profile addition. The show's relatively low cost compared with prestige dramas full of expensive A-listers and CGI dragons had been a selling point for the network. Showrunners Mickey Down and Konrad Kay, who previously worked in finance, were green and inexpensive, as was much of the young cast.

The cable network is in desperate need of an Emmy-worthy series that will attract eyeballs after *Succession* wrapped last year, especially with *Euphoria* and *The White Lotus* not returning until 2025. *Industry* borrows elements from all those shows: Like *Succession*, it delights in skewering the ultra-wealthy; like *Euphoria*, it's filled with sex and drugs and, despite having both in abundance, its Gen Z characters have the bleakest of outlooks; and, like *White Lotus*, this season plays out like a whodunit. Despite a dedicated online fandom and critical acclaim, *Industry* has never enjoyed the robust viewership of these

other HBO darlings. But that can be attributed, at least in part, to HBO's declining to spotlight it as a prestige offering. It has a reputation as a show catering to Gen Z even though the writing and performances are equal to those of other prestige-branded series. Can the network position it now, with 16 episodes to catch up on, to appeal to older viewers in search of their Sunday-night watch?

"When I first read the script for Season 1, I said, 'This is what would happen if *Euphoria* and *Succession* had a baby.' I just want everyone to know I said it first," says Myha'la on the same call. "It's sex and drugs in a world of money. I'm not mad at that comparison at all."

IF *SUCCESSION*'S LOGAN ROY was an old man at the peak of his powers, the younger and more diverse group of bankers on *Industry* are Roy aspirants. It's chilling to watch them in the infancy of that ruthless life cycle. For now, they espouse the ideals of youth, even if they don't always practice them. That tension is central to the third season, in which Harington's Sir Henry Muck—an old-money dolt with a hilariously accurate name who is a perpetual disappointment to his family—enlists the bank to help launch a green-energy company. The series takes aim at the hypocrisy of corporations that pay lip service to going green but will jump into bed with oil if enough money is on the line.

It's also taking a darker turn. As *Industry* expands its scope outside the trading floor and into the halls of power—involving government officials, media moguls, and members of Britain's landed gentry—the stakes are about more than just money. We begin to see how these aspiring power players might do irreparable damage to the world. "The concerns of Season 1 were, 'What does everyone think of me?'" says Abela of Yasmin and her cohort. "They've grown out of that fear, but now they have adult problems. The problems are existential."

*Industry* has matured as a show as it has narrowed its focus within its sprawling ensemble cast. In the first season, *Industry* followed bankers

**'This is what would happen if *Euphoria* and *Succession* had a baby.'**

MYHA'LA,  
ON *INDUSTRY*



Abela, left, and Myha'la play bankers and frenemies







from different backgrounds. There was Gus (David Jonsson), the well-connected Black gay Oxford grad; white middle-class Robert (Harry Lawtey), who trades on good looks but can't master dressing like his generationally wealthy co-workers; Yasmin, the Lebanese British multilingual heiress who aside from her charm is hopeless at her job; and Harper, the Black American outsider with no connections but unbridled determination and flexible morals. The show explores the entrenched class system in England and racial dynamics at a national bank by giving these people the same goal and watching as they employ various despicable means to snag the prize.

In Seasons 2 and 3, the show focuses on Yasmin and Harper, the ultimate frenemies. Harper's American ambition runs up against Yasmin's crutches of privilege and wealth. Yasmin's insecurities at work are exacerbated by Harper's savant-like talents. They will undermine each other at the office and then split a bottle of wine the same night at the flat they share.

"The things they adore about each other are also the things they resent," says Myha'la. "Harper thinks Yasmin comes from money and uses her feminine wiles to her advantage. Those are things that Harper doesn't have or can't use. Yasmin [thinks] Harper is brainy. She's tricky. Harper maneuvers in ways that Yasmin can't." Abela jumps in: "They fundamentally speak different languages. They're both quite selfish people who are never going to put the other one first."

This selfishness is what makes them so interesting. Both experience the gamut of bad behavior at work: sexism, racism, harassment. A lesser show would position them as victims. But the two women leverage those same bad experiences to get ahead—or else inflict that behavior on the women who come after them. The series is more interested in how toxicity can embed itself in an institution than telling a tale of overcoming hardship.

That also makes for increasingly complex characters as the series wears on. "For Yasmin, there are moments when the vulnerable young girl shines



Abela gazes out to sea shooting a scene on a yacht in Mallorca

through. But she's got a lot more armor on now, and that's a side effect of being in an industry where if you're not fierce, nobody is going to take you seriously," Abela says. "She also refuses to learn to be a better person."

**FROM THE JUMP**, both Myha'la and Abela helped shape their characters. Harper was initially written as anxious. Myha'la says the showrunners were "adamant about bringing as much of myself as I could." That included being up front about their limitations: "They were like, 'We're not Black American women. We can't write your experience,'" she recalls. "If I am Harper, I'm walking into a space where I'm trying to impress people. I'm not going to let them know I'm not confident in my abilities. That to me is like *Being a Black American 101*."

Harper suppressing her emotions also allowed Myha'la, who since *Industry* debuted has also starred in the films *Bodies Bodies Bodies* and *Leave the World Behind*, to demonstrate her acting chops. "Coming off as super confident also gave me someplace

to go," she says. "Deciding when the cracks show was really important."

Yasmin, meanwhile, was given a love interest in Season 1: Robert, the banker born to working-class parents. The heiress was initially written to be timid at work and turned on by taking orders from Robert in the bedroom, but this didn't track to Abela. "If she looks like a deer in headlights on the trading floor, someone will hold her hand," she says. "But the place where she really can exhibit power is sexually. It would be too bitter of a pill to swallow to let a fumbling guy take the lead in the bedroom."

Yasmin's multiseason arc of teasing Robert with not only sex but also wealth and status has become one of the show's touchstones. The relationship has allowed the writers to explore whether romances can really cross class boundaries in a country where the divide between old and new money is especially stark. That question becomes central to the third season, when Harington's spoiled Henry expresses interest in Yasmin.

This season, both Harper and Yasmin deal with some serious daddy issues, literally and metaphorically. Yasmin despises her father for having affairs but relies on him financially.



His disappearance—and the revelation of his theft—has left her penniless and a target of the relentless paparazzi. Henry’s family owns one of those tabloids, and a strategic alliance could shield Yasmin from scrutiny. Harper, meanwhile, has targeted for revenge a father figure, her former mentor Eric (the great Ken Leung). Eric groomed Harper to be his replacement. But after mutual backstabbing, she found herself at risk of needing to return to New York, where a buried secret threatens to upend her new life in London. Now that she’s back on her feet in a new position, she is obsessed with taking him down. “Betrayal is serious business,” says Myha’la.

There are echoes in both storylines of *Succession*’s Shiv Roy, a highly competent woman who, despite espousing liberal ideals, wants nothing more than to please her money-worshipping father. Like Shiv, these women make compromises on their quest for power. But Shiv’s security was never in doubt, even if she didn’t become CEO of her father’s company. Harper has no safety net. Her only security is cold hard cash. And, for the first time in her life, Yasmin is beginning to feel vulnerable without her father. That gives this season a new sense of dramatic tension.

Those who might wring their hands over the show’s salacious aspects can find depth in this desperate scramble to survive in the world of finance. And, this season, for those who glaze over upon hearing a glossary of finance terms, there’s the whodunit. If the show finally captures the audience it deserves, it’ll have permission to expand its scope in Season 4. The end of Season 3 teases the potential to harpoon Silicon Valley startups, a Murdoch-like media empire, and America’s brutish billionaires. “Where Season 3 ends,” says Abela, “it was definitely not on Season 1 Yasmin’s vision board.”



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## Darren Walker The departing Ford Foundation president on female philanthropists, relocating prisons, and the dinners he'll have with friends

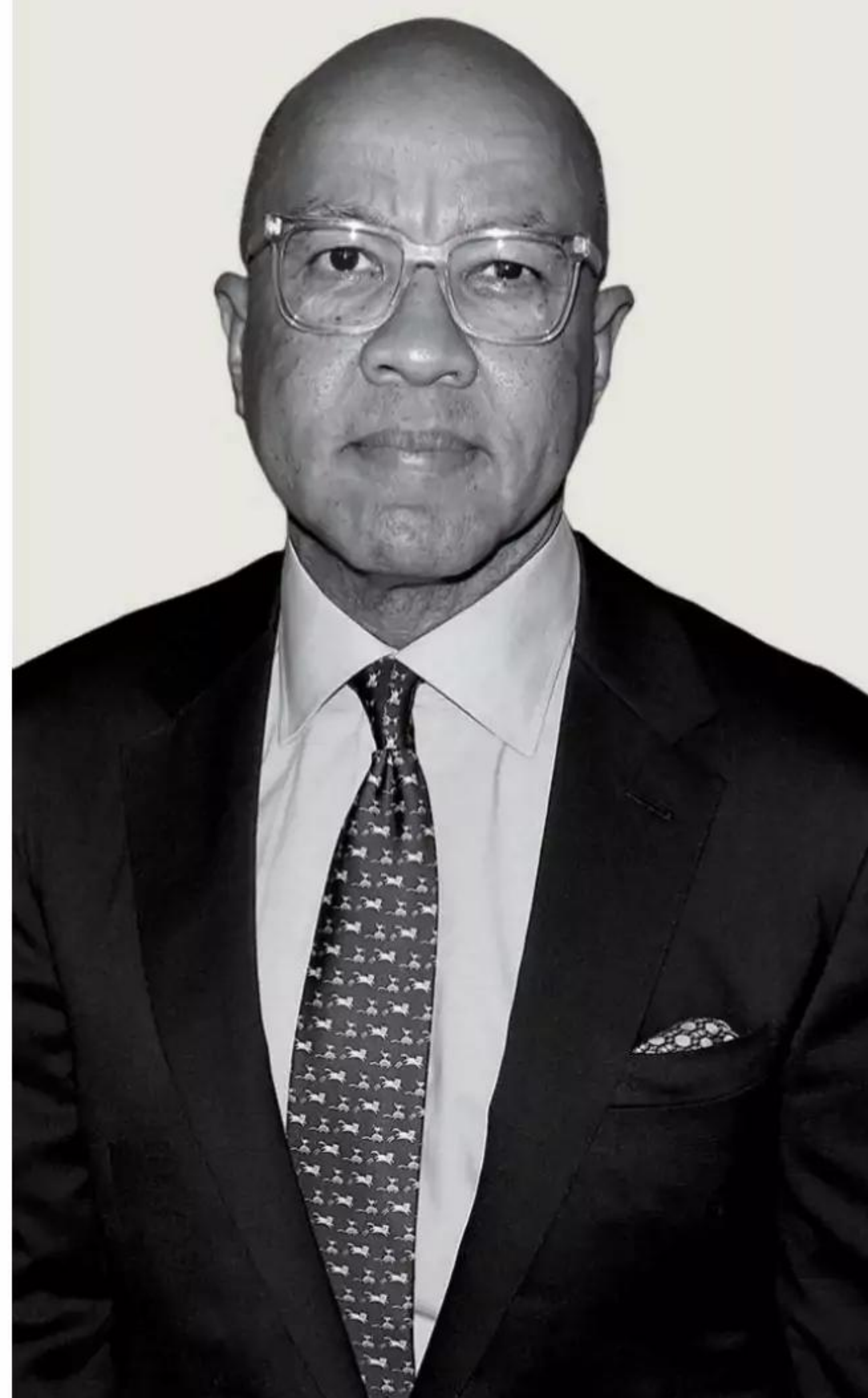
**You just announced you're leaving the foundation, at what you say is a critical time in its history. What do you mean by that?** If you are a philanthropy committed to the idea that democracy is the best form of government, and that the full participation of the citizenry is essential for democracies to be healthy, this is a challenging time. Hope is the oxygen of democracy, but inequality is the enemy of hope. Hopeless people will do things that we thought were never possible in our society. That worries me.

**People who push back against the notion that income inequality is bad often say money gives billionaires like Henry Ford the scope to take big swings. How would you answer that?** I think it's important not to demonize the wealthy. It's one of the special attributes of this country that people of very modest means can be extraordinarily successful. Henry Ford was a complicated character; there is no doubt that he'd be surprised that a Black gay man is president of his foundation. I think the fact that I am is a testament to the progress that has been made. But I do believe that if we have so much inequality that the balance of wealth distorts our democracy, then we should push back against that.

**You'd hoped for New York City's notorious Rikers Island prison to be closed. Why is it so difficult?** I served on the commission on the future of Rikers Island. It recommended that Rikers be closed and that there be small facilities in other parts of the city. The challenge is, we have advocates who want no prisons. And we have citizens who don't want facilities in their community. It's very frustrating. We do need a minimum number of decent beds where people can be treated with dignity.

**How does being the head of an organization like this affect your personal relationships?**

There is no doubt that you breathe rarefied air. You never have a bad meal. People go out of their way to be deferential. I'll be able to move on, after I leave Ford, with joy. But I will absolutely have fewer friends—and more dinners with real friends.



**You've been publicly criticized by prison abolitionists, including former Ford fellows. Did that smart?** I was profoundly wounded, emotionally very, very wounded by the protesters and by the disapproval of some of my own staff. But one of the things you learn about leadership is that you have to be guided by values and principles and the framework to navigate really complex challenges. In my personal life I had just lost my partner. It was wrenching. But I don't regret the decision I made.

**We have seen the rise of several prominent female philanthropists. Are they different?** The most exciting philanthropy under way in America today is led by women philanthropists: Melinda French Gates, MacKenzie Scott, Laurene Powell Jobs, Alice Walton, Barbara Hostetter. So much of philanthropy has been about controlling our grantees. These women are taking a different tack where they say, "We want to support institutions."

**Are there any moon-shot projects you wish you started earlier?** We have a working group of foundations on the question of philanthropy and AI. I wish we had started that earlier and developed a framework for how AI could help us with our grant-making. And to think about the implications for philanthropy.

**If you were starting now with just \$1 million, what would you do?** I would probably seek ways to influence thought about policy and technology that ensures that we get the very best of technology while mitigating the harm. We cannot have the bias, discrimination, and unfairness that existed in the analog world simply be transferred to the digital realm. It will only exacerbate inequality. —BELINDA LUSCOMBE



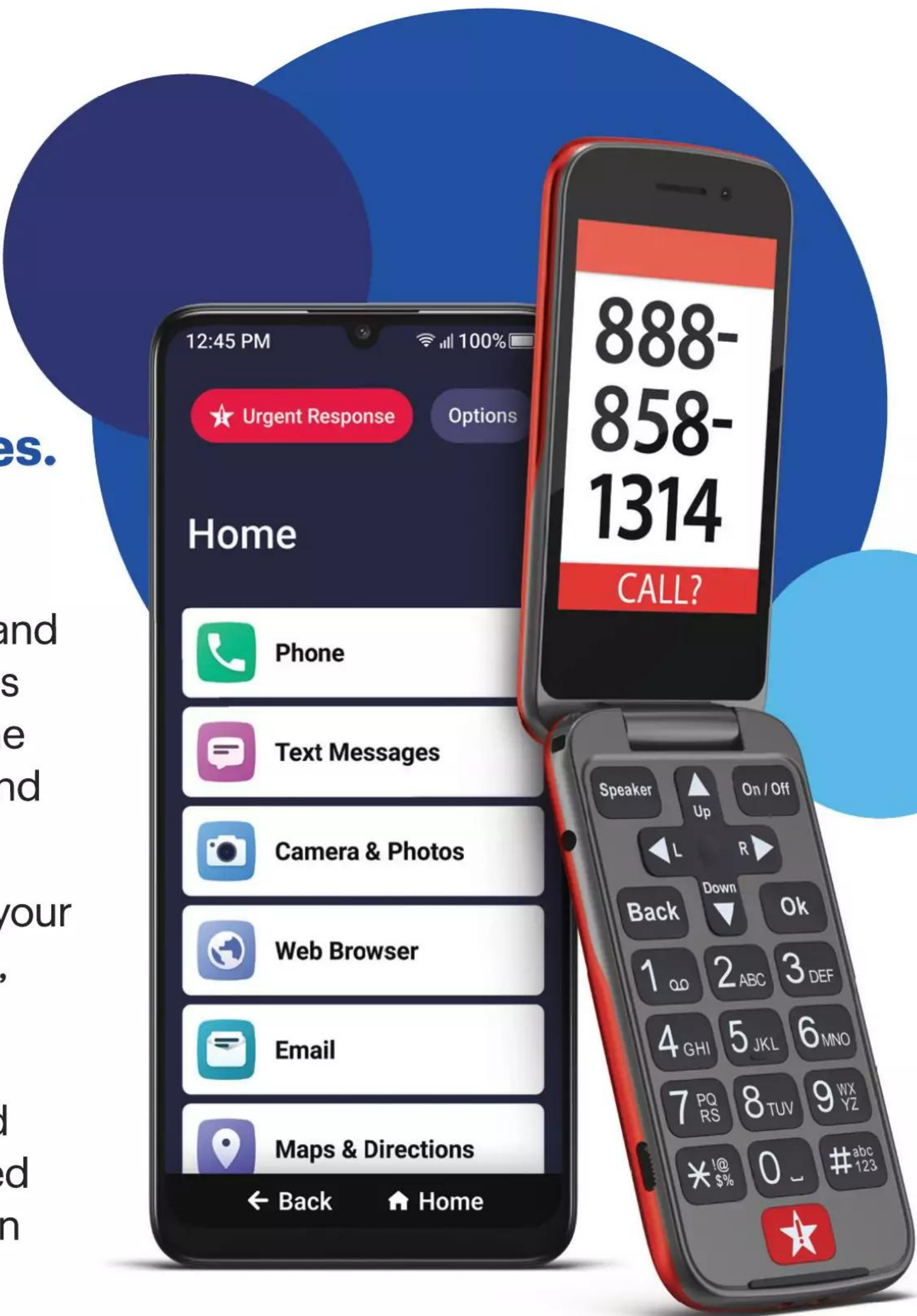


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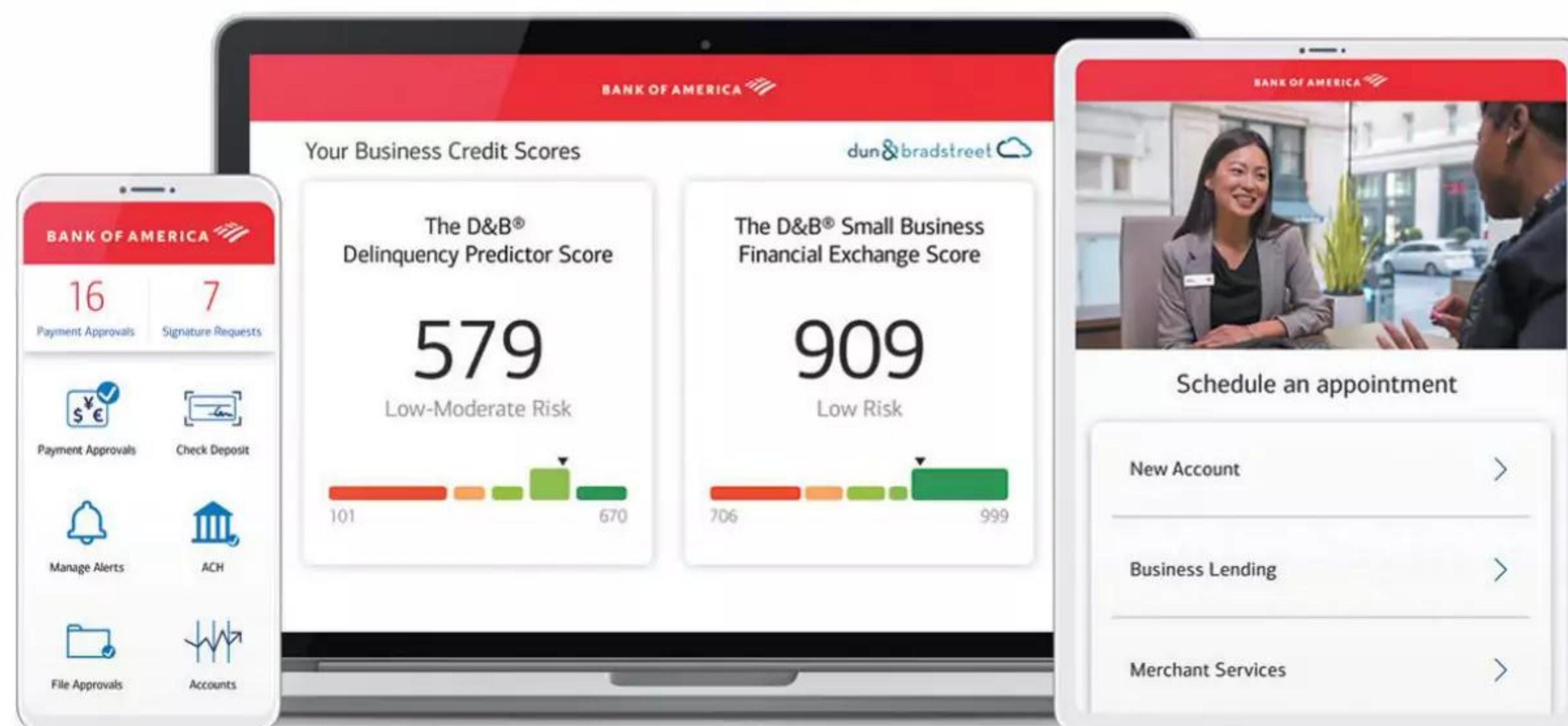
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